

THE CHARACTER OF HUMAN FREEDOM AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR  
THE PARISH MINISTER: AN EXPLORATION BASED ON THE THOUGHT OF  
NICOLAI ALEXANDROVITCH BERDYAEV AND FREDERICK S. PERLS

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PARISH MINISTER: AN EXPLORATION BASED ON THE THOUGHT OF  
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The dissertation effort performs an analysis and integration of the concept of freedom as a central dynamic of the human personality. The analysis considers both the theological perspective of Berdyaev and the psycho-dynamic perspective of Perls, the correlation of these two being applied to parish ministry. Berdyaev's elemental metaphysical and personal category, freedom, is tied to Perls' use of responsibility as a key description of organic reality. Creativity is seen as the center for the integral meaning of freedom and responsibility. Creative activity transcends the separation of subjective and objective experience and becomes the focus of the character of human freedom. From this center the character of freedom/responsibility is considered in a variety of both personal-psychological and religious-theological aspects. Thus understood, the concept of freedom is developed both for the minister as a person and for the tasks of ministry.

## INTRODUCTION

In view of the immense role the problem of freedom has played in the history of theology, it is surprising to see how little ontological inquiry into the meaning and nature of freedom is carried on by modern theologians, or even how little the results of previous inquiry are used by them, for a concept of freedom is just as important for theology as a concept of reason.<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of treating this problem is two-fold. First, it is my purpose to gain insight into the dynamics of human freedom. Secondly, I find it important to examine connections between philosophical theology and theoretical ministerial skills. Each of these purposes has several sides.

The way in which the problem of freedom is handled is an important indicator of the shape and scope of one's anthropology. This is true whether one is a philosopher, theologian, psychologist, politician, or pastor. Even the behaviorists who maintain that freedom is a hoax find it important to deal with the issue of freedom head on and at length. The question of human freedom implies a response to the questions of evil, God, and human capacity. Thus simply to accomplish a fairly complete and articulate notion of freedom will be to have some important handles

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<sup>1</sup>Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), I-182.

on the question of human nature.

There is another aspect of seeking insight into the dynamics of freedom. It involves the inner, personal experience of liberation in both the traditional religious and the therapeutic senses. It also involves the matter of choice, understood both morally and creatively, as experienced by the individual. In terms of my own motivation for choosing this problem, I must say that it has been the fact that the term freedom expresses an aspect of my deepest experiences and wrestlings that makes it a significant intellectual question for me.

Working with the dynamics of human freedom also becomes a purposeful task because it can be useful in ministry. The pastoring minister needs to have some grasp of anthropological issues. He also needs to have a framework which makes meaningful his own experiences and quests. Further, he is one to whom persons come seeking liberation, power, and the understanding of limits. It is in the minister's task that the second purpose of dealing with the problem of freedom becomes significant.

A minister needs to be able to move between the traditional articulations and the practice of ministering in concrete situations. This is not an unrealistic task since the movement in both the so-called philosophical and practical theologies is toward the other. Reasoned and speculative statements must be grounded in concrete exper-



iences to be valuable. Practical theory must abstract from the concrete to be useful symbolization for many.

This being the case, there is still often a wide gap between the statements of the theologian and the practicing therapist. The minister must somehow make sense of the two for himself and be a bridge across the gap. The more he can assimilate of each realm, the better his chances of being one who can minister.

In retrospect I see more fully that the reason I love Berdyaev is that he is an artist. His thought is alluringly poetic in tone. It moves with theme and counterpoint which make for liveliness and excitement. For all the chaos of his unsystematic writing, there is a wholeness to it. It has a center and in that center is the person, Nicolai Alexandrovitch Berdyaev. It is no wonder that for such an artist the center of his thought contains the melding of the themes of creation, freedom, and personality.

In choosing the work of Frederick S. Perls, I acknowledge that his ideas, methods, and audacity have been for me a source of healing, growth, and liberation. Furthermore, gestalt therapy is holistic, both 'process' and 'existential.' Most of all, it fits.

## Chapter I

THE CHARACTER OF HUMAN FREEDOM IN THE THOUGHT  
OF NICOLAI BERDYAEV

## A. THE COSMOLOGICAL GROUND

1. Mythical Language for a Cosmology of Freedom

The philosophy of Nicolai Berdyaev has a mystical quality. This should be no surprise for as he says himself, his metaphysical thought is based on categories which are mysteries.<sup>1</sup> "Actually, spiritual states do not correspond to anything, they simply are; they are the prime reality, they are more existential than anything reflected in the objective world."<sup>2</sup> From this perspective Berdyaev attempts to find forms of expression adequate to the rational mind of what is unabashedly irrational or trans-rational. In mysticism, especially that of the German mystics, he found both kindred understandings and language vehicles for his cosmological revelation.

Rational theology and metaphysics will tend to debate these mystical statements, to classify them as monism, pantheism, or as identity of God and man. But this tendency only demonstrates the impotence of thought when confronted with the mystery of

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<sup>1</sup> Nicolai A. Berdyaev, The Divine and the Human, (London: Bles, 1949), pp. 43-44.

<sup>2</sup> Nicolai A. Berdyaev, Spirit and Reality, (London: Bles, 1939), p.6.

Divine-human relations as revealed in mystical experience.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the inherent difficulties, expressions from mystical experience become the basis of his thought. They bear more fully for him the meaning of all the particularities of his philosophy than do any other categories he knows.

There is no better place to begin to understand Berdyaev than in these mythic formulae. Only after pursuing their usage through the full range of his thought, does one discover their full meaning. That is simply one of the givens of working with his philosophy.

## 2. Freedom and God as Ultimate Categories

An insight from the mysticism of Jacob Boehme becomes the distinctive element in Berdyaev's cosmology, the concept of the Ungrund. It is also in this concept that freedom finds its position as an ultimate category in Berdyaev's scheme. In the following passages Berdyaev introduces the concept and pays tribute to its source.

Like Eckhart's Gottheit, Boehme's Ungrund goes deeper than God. We should probably be right in thinking of Ungrund as the primal preexistential freedom. For freedom preceeds being. Freedom is not created. That is the definition I person-

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 144.

ally should propose.<sup>4</sup>

For the first time perhaps in the history of human thought, Boehme saw that at the basis of being and superior to being lies groundless freedom, the passionate desire of nothing to become something, the darkness in which fire and light begin to kindle into flame.<sup>5</sup>

Ungrund might be translated Groundless or Non-Ground. Berdyaev describes it in a multi-faceted way. Some of the words with which he describes its chief characteristics include "nothingness,"<sup>6</sup> in the same sense as above -- no-thingness -- prior to existence; "groundless,"<sup>7</sup> being itself the ultimate 'ground' out of which all else emerges; "baseless"; and "in Non-being, if we use ontological terminology."<sup>8</sup> Many other words come to mind in attempting to understand this concept -- abyssmal, ineffable, darkness, and deep. Another name for Ungrund, and its chief description, is freedom. Berdyaev names it freedom as often as he uses Boehme's term. "The Ungrund must be understood above all as freedom, freedom in the darkness."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>5</sup>Nicolai A. Berdyaev, The Beginning and the End, (New York: Harper & Row, 1952), p. 107.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>8</sup>Nicolai A. Berdyaev, Slavery and Freedom (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944), p. 76.

<sup>9</sup>Berdyaev, The Beginning and the End, p. 108.

This ultimate freedom, which is at the base of -- and prior to -- everything, is not a neutral or sterile reality. As has been mentioned, it also has the property of will or urge, the desire to be some-thing. Berdyaev describes this as follows:

In the darkness of the Ungrund a fire flames up and this is freedom, meonic, potential freedom. According to Boehme freedom is opposed to nature, but nature emanated from freedom. Freedom is like nothingness, but from it something emanates. The hunger of freedom, of the baseless will for something, must be satisfied.<sup>10</sup>

Hence, one might well characterize this cosmic freedom as potentiality. Irrational, unbound potentiality stands behind all that is, as its base, its ultimate origin and source.

This freedom is the Godhead in Berdyaev's metaphysic (see Reference 4). It is a divine principle or reality. Along with irrational freedom, which is the divine Absolute, there is God the person. The relation of God to Ungrund or freedom is crucial in Berdyaev's scheme. In the mythology, God arose out of freedom. Freedom is the divine principle; that is, not an actuality in the same sense as God and persons, but a deeper, more elemental reality.

God is freedom actualized in divine personality. God is both the fulfillment of freedom (which is no-thing)

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

in actualization, and also the creator who transforms pure potentiality into something. This dual aspect of the divine is not to be conceived of as two Gods. God is the divine personality while freedom is the prior, baseless principle. Berdyaev touches upon this connection in a slightly different manner in the following:

The god who reveals Himself to the world and to man is not the Absolute; the Absolute cannot have relation within anything at all; the Absolute is an inexpressible Mystery. The Godhead (Gottheit) is an inexpressible Mystery in which, we believe, everything will be resolved. But God (Gott) is a Mystery which tends to reveal itself.

We are not speaking of various Gods but of one and the same God Who hides Himself and reveals Himself in different degrees.<sup>11</sup>

Two aspects of God warrant a further statement.

First is what it means that God is personality. The concept of personality will be more fully developed in looking at Berdyaev's anthropology. At this point, it is significant that God is personality for three essential reasons. First, personality embodies freedom. Berdyaev makes a firm distinction between the world of objectification, the world of the sciences; and the world of personal, subjective (he would say trans-subjective-objective) spiritual reality.

Secondly and similarly, "Personality is more

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<sup>11</sup>Berdyaev, The Divine and The Human, pp. 43-44.

primary than being."<sup>12</sup> This fact is also a part of personality's participation in primal freedom. Whereas being is a category out of observation over time, personality occurs in eternity. It participates in the primal categories of spirit and freedom. Note the following:

Being is nature (ousia), and it belongs to the objectivized world which is brought into being by rationalization. To think of spirit as being means to think of it in the naturalistic way as nature, as an object. But spirit is not an object, it is not nature, it is not being in the sense of substance. Spirit is subject, it is an act, it is freedom. A primary act is not being, being is a congealed act. The mystics truly and profoundly taught that God is not being in the sense of substance, that the limiting concept of being is not applicable to God. God is; but He is not being in the sense of substance.<sup>13</sup>

Personality is a first order emergent out of the ground of Ungrund or limitless freedom.

Thirdly, personality is relational. This also is an aspect of its primal emergence out of freedom. We will later examine the microcosmic quality of personality. Personality takes the universe into itself. This is still, of course, in a non-causal or spiritual sense. A manifestation of microcosmic activity is the relational character of personality. God, unlike limitless freedom, is the One whom we meet as persons ourselves.

These three aspects of God as personality are tied

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<sup>12</sup>Berdyayev, Slavery and Freedom, p. 75.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

together with the grounding of God in primal freedom. As personalities God and humankind are emergent out of freedom. To say that personality is dependent on freedom is not quite right, although without freedom there would be no personality. It fits better with the supra-rational character of this understanding to say that personality is born out of freedom. This connection between God and freedom (as well as between personality or spirit and freedom) introduces the second aspect of God which warrants further development, as it is also tied up with the relationship between personality and freedom. It is God as creator.

A fuller treatment of creativity will be given at the end of this chapter. At this point let it suffice to say that God as creator is one of the essential notions of Berdyaev about God's nature. God as creator is of course responding to that urge of the divine principle --freedom -- to bring Being out of Non-Being. In so doing God relies upon His own essential grounding in freedom. God is actualizing potentiality.

Creative activity needs to be carefully understood. The creative acts in which we engage as in artistic pursuits are significant to Berdyaev. Yet as seen in the objective realm they are but the dim remnants of the creative activity of the spirit. The self creation of the personality in a moment of human life, as we experience it, is closer to the sort of creation at stake here. In the following statement



Berdyaev discusses his understanding of God as creator and ties it again with God as person.

God is not the cause of the world. We may say that God is the foundation of the world, its creator, but even these are imperfect words. We must free ourselves of all sociomorphism and cosmomorphism. God is not a force in the natural sense of the word, acting in space and time. He is not the master and director of this world. He is neither the world itself, nor a force released in the world. It is more correct to say that God is the Meaning, the Truth of the world. God is Spirit and Freedom. If in contrast with pantheistic monism we say that God is a person, this must be understood not in the limited natural-human sense, but in the spiritual sense of a concrete image with which personal contact is possible for us.<sup>14</sup>

### 3. Time and Existence

Berdyaev's notion of spirit or personality and its primacy over being reveal another aspect of his cosmology. It is that of his understanding of time and being. Existential or 'eternal' time, as opposed to sequential time and primary creative acts, as opposed to being, pose a problem to Berdyaev. That problem is very much the problem of modern humanity; it is life lived primarily in awareness of being and historical time. Berdyaev's understanding is that the primary realities are the former in each case (existential time and primary creative acts), while the latter are the deceptive abstractions which appear to be

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<sup>14</sup>Nicolai A. Berdyaev, The Realm of Spirit and the Realm of Caesar, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1952), p. 39.

prime realities. "It is not true to say that movement and change take place because time exists; it is true to say that time exists because movement and change take place."<sup>15</sup>

The results of the common human misperception of time and existence are tragic. In part, the tragedy relates to an idolization of history and technology. He states his case in regard to time well in the following:

In this connection we must consider the problem of time and eternity, man's ability to experience the instant detached from the torrent of time. As Kierkegaard has said, instants should be atoms of eternity rather than atoms of time. . . . But present day technical actualism is, on the contrary, a sign of man's final submission to objectifying processes and of the loss of his spirit and freedom. As a result, spirit is interpreted as an epiphenomenon, as a product of material technical processes.<sup>16</sup>

This understanding is well suited to the gestalt understanding of Perls, as will be examined later. Likewise, the truth about time reveals the truth about existence. Berdyaev understands the primary modality of existence to be instantaneous creative act which is in freedom. This is different from the simplistic, causal explanation to be found in behaviorism. Consider the following:

The . interpretation of the phenomenal world in terms of causality, which is a condition of getting to know it, does not in fact allow for the emergence of what is new, of what has not been before, of what is not derived from that which has already

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<sup>15</sup>Berdyaev, Slavery and Freedom, p. 258.

<sup>16</sup>Berdyaev, Spirit and Reality, p. 174.

been. Creative newness is causeless.

When you describe the cause of a thing, you embark upon a series which is infinite, and you never reach the primordial creative act in which a new thing in being was for the first time disclosed.<sup>17</sup>

By contrast, one catches a glimpse of Berdyaev's eschatological hope in this description of the reverse to the tragic, common perception of existence.

In the spiritual life there can be no distinction between the means and the end because there is a different attitude to time: the present is no longer a means and the future an end; instead, there are only the instant and eternity. Nor can there be any distinction between theory and practice, for contemplation and eternity are one in the spiritual life. It is the achievement of inner wholeness, of a whole mind or of wisdom.<sup>18</sup>

With these basic descriptions of his cosmological scheme one can see the significance of freedom in Berdyaev's thought. The spiritual realities of God and personality, as well as the truth revealed in them about time and existence, present an intricately woven, holistic pattern. The pattern requires the ultimate category of freedom throughout. Historical time and existence are utterly dependent upon the eternal present which occurs in the creative act of personality. The creative act is a spiritual reality, which means that it is rooted in and emerges from groundless freedom. Freedom is the divine reality behind God. As a personality,

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<sup>17</sup>Berdyaev, The Beginning and the End, p. 158.

<sup>18</sup>Berdyaev, Spirit and Reality, pp. 194-5.

God also actualizes freedom; as a creative actor, God remains firmly based in the divine free principle. This is the definition of a spiritual or primal reality, that it is rooted in freedom.

#### 4. The Significance of Freedom in this Cosmological Scheme

From this central integral set of realities, freedom's pervasive significance moves out in all directions in Berdyaev's philosophy. Notable are the values which emanate from God and Godhead. God's own emergence is the fulfilment of potential freedom. God comes wholly out of freedom, yet is no longer the abysmal darkness or nothingness of freedom. Berdyaev speaks of grace as "transfigured freedom"<sup>19</sup> in this same sense of actualized freedom. Grace is also an aspect of human experience. In the following statement he pursues this concept:

God is freedom, and not necessity, not authority over man and the world. What the theologians call grace, placing it alongside human freedom, is this action in man of divine freedom. We might say that the existence of God is man's charter of liberty, his inner justification for his struggle for freedom against nature and society.<sup>20</sup>

Along with grace as a value is beauty. In fact, Berdyaev's notion of beauty is similar to grace and, short

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<sup>19</sup>Berdyaev, The Realm of Spirit. . ., p. 44.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 41.

of persons themselves, might be said to be the prime value. This is understandable recalling the significance of God as creator. Beauty is in fact the aim of creation. The juncture of beauty and grace can be seen in the self-creation of the person, as also in our common notion of graceful. The creative act is an act to embody freedom, to transfigure or make it actual in beauty and grace.

The significance of freedom in Berdyaev's thought also determines his response to the problem of evil. Metaphysically, the source of evil is the same Ungrund which is the source of all that is. This is not to say that freedom is evil or has any evil content. Freedom has no content and that very fact allows evil as well as spirit to be its emergents. Freedom is potentiality but not cause. Evil is an aspect of the tragedy of the fall into enslavement to temporal time and causal existence.

To say that freedom is the cause of evil is the same as saying that evil has no cause. In this case freedom does mean absence of cause. It is only at a later stage, in its consequences, that evil submits to the power of causality. Evil may be a cause, but it has itself no cause. Freedom is a definite mystery, an irrational element.<sup>21</sup>

Evil is the apparent victor in the temporal/causal world. This is partly due to the deception of that realm of reality. The fact that the primal realities are spiritual, the personality of God and the personalities of humankind,

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<sup>21</sup>Berdyaev, Spirit and Reality, p. 113.

gives an alternative to nihilism. Berdyaev suggests that in a world of materiality, matter appears to be more powerful than spirit. In fact matter is passive while only spirit has power -- the power of creative activity.<sup>22</sup>

The significance of freedom as an ultimate category comes to fruition for mankind in the concept of personality. That is dealt with in depth in the next section. At this point the importance of freedom's presence in personality lies in the positing of God as the divine personality. As personality, God is very close to humankind, sharing in our tragedies and having his own internal experience. "Men are afraid to ascribe to Him inner conflict and tragedy characteristic of all life, the longing for His 'other,' for the birth of man."<sup>23</sup> Yet this is precisely Berdyaev's notion of God, thoroughly grounded in freedom and therefore capable of the internal experience of tragedy.

## B. THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL FIGURE

### 1. Personality, the Defining Conceptualization

The definitive concept for Berdyaev's understanding of human nature is that of personality. Personality has

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 189.

<sup>23</sup>Nicolai A. Berdyaev, The Fate of Man in the Modern World, (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1935), p. 28.

been discussed in relation to God. Indeed, personality is for Berdyaev the reality of the image of God in humanity. It is, as well, the image of humanity in God, a fact which finds its revelation in the Christ.<sup>24</sup> It has also been noted that personality is a spiritual reality. Among other things this means that its ground is freedom. It is not a material reality, but rather a free, creative, relational reality. It has no power in the common sense of force, but rather in meeting or communion, and in creativity.<sup>25</sup>

Personality is not all of what Berdyaev has to say about human nature. Therefore when speaking of mankind, Berdyaev distinguishes between having spirit and being spirit. "The distinction between being and having is only completely resolved in God"<sup>26</sup> And so mankind is a reality which connects two worlds. We are in the image of God, having personality; a spiritual reality is rooted in freedom. Out of that same freedom has emerged consciousness of the material, temporal order, complete with both its attendant beauty and tragedy.

Berdyaev stresses repeatedly several aspects or

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<sup>24</sup>Berdyaev, Slavery and Freedom, p. 45.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>26</sup>Berdyaev, Spirit and Reality, p. 171.

qualities of personality which result from its participation in freedom. To begin, "Personality is a microcosm, a complete universe. It is personality alone that can bring together a universal content and be a potential universe in an individual form."<sup>27</sup> Berdyaev sees the personality as taking into itself the universe it knows; so that what is experienced -- even as objective or 'out there' -- is in fact known inwardly. The personality is 'knower' and as such is individual/universe or micro-cosm. "The realization of personality, the concentration and actualization of its strength, takes the sun into itself, it inwardly receives the whole cosmos, the whole of history, all mankind."<sup>28</sup> In the concept of the microcosm is demonstrated the height of the validity, value, and beauty of the human person in Berdyaev's thought.

Another constantly repeated aspect of personality in Berdyaev's works is that of creativity. The following sample is quoted at length as it not only reiterates the dual quality of human nature, but it also shows the significance of creative activity in Berdyaev's personalistic thought.

In human personality there is much that is generic, much that belongs to history, tradition, society,

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<sup>27</sup> Berdyaev, Slavery, and Freedom, p. 21.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 42.



class, family, much that is 'common.' But it is precisely this which is not 'personal' in personality. That which is 'personal' is original, connected with the primary fountain head, authentic. Personality must perform its self-existent, original, creative acts, and this alone makes it personality and constitutes its unique value.

Personality in man is the triumph over the determination of the social group. Personality is not a substance but an act, a creative act. Every act is a creative act; a victory over the dragging burden of the world, the triumph of freedom over the world's slavery. The fear of exertion is harmful to the realization of personality. Personality is effort and conflict, the conquest of self and of the world, victory over slavery, it is emancipation.<sup>29</sup>

It is through creative activity that personality functions to constitute itself as a microcosm. Creativity is its manner of bringing about self in obtaining the universe. Berdyaev also refers to this creative activity as a "break through."<sup>30</sup> This is an in-breaking of the transcendent realm of spirit into the immanent; it is the jarring of the plodding causal world with something new from the realm of freedom.

Alongside the creative acts of personality, which occur in existential time, personality also has an abiding aspect. Hence the person comes to a position allowing for a fall into enslavement to historical time. Only God transcends this problem fully, as stated before. This abiding quality gives personality much of its value. It is in the

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

possibility that instants can become "atoms of eternity"<sup>31</sup> that the qualities of microcosmality, creativity, and integrality obtain their full value. In this respect Berdyaev considers personality an "existential center" which "cannot be a means to any end whatever," and which "has a right not only to life, a right which is denied by contemporary civilization, but also a right to possess the universal content of life."<sup>32</sup>

A final, oft-mentioned quality of personality is its wholeness or integrality. This is similar to what is involved in personality as microcosm. Microcosm seems to stress its infinite reach while integrality stresses its synthesizing unity. Indeed, all descriptive attributes have their own interrelatedness, their own sort of integral character. They are merely slightly different vantage points on one and the same ultimate, holistic reality, the personality.

The growth of personality, the realization of personality certainly does not mean the formation of a whole out of its parts. It means rather the creative acts of personality, as a whole thing, which is not brought out of anything and not put together from anything. The form of personality is integral, it is present as a whole in all the acts of person-

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<sup>31</sup>Berdyaev, Spirit and Reality, p. 174.

<sup>32</sup>Berdyaev, Slavery and Freedom, p. 10.

ality, personality has a unique, an unrepeatable form, Gestalt.<sup>33</sup>

As a summary analysis, it seems that what Berdyaev is intending by his descriptions of personality is this: microcosmic describes personality's relational content, its limitless quality with freedom as a ground; creative activity describes its mode of constitution and entrance into the world of time and space; and integrality describes its manner of constitution. The fact of its abiding quality in time gives it life, which is both to its added uniqueness, beauty, and power; and to its potential enslavement.

## 2. The Position of Dualism in Berdyaev's Scheme

Berdyaev's thought is heavily dualistic in language. Nowhere is this more apparent than in his discussion of personality. It is easy to criticize Berdyaev for his common use of dualities such as spirit versus nature, inner versus outer existence, or realm of spirit versus realm of Caesar. The criticism is important for clarity and to avoid being

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 23. Berdyaev goes on to say, "What is known as Gestalt psychology, which regards form as the primary qualitative value, is more acceptable to personalism than other systems of psychology." Needless to say, I am pleased to discover this seeming justification of my own effort. However, when Berdyaev wrote this, Perls, who is considered the father of Gestalt therapy, was an unknown who had not yet published his major theoretical works. At the same time, Perls' model from the experimental branch of psychology (as different from clinical psychology) was precisely this same Gestalt theory of perception with its emphasis on holistic form.

trapped into simplistic, dualistic thinking.

Properly understood, the dualism to which humankind is subject is a kind of transition stage in the motion toward completion of personality. Dualism is an aspect of the process of carrying out the elements of freedom and creativity while entering into a time-bound order of being. Berdyaev often attempts to lay out his own perceptions at this point, not only clarifying the dualism he sees; but also showing its being a transitional reality.

Man is the point of intersection of two worlds. One of the illusions consists in interpreting the difference between the two worlds as a difference of substance. In actual fact it is a difference in mode of existence. Man passes from slavery to freedom, from a state of disintegration, to a condition of completeness, from impersonality to personality, from passivity to creativeness, that is to say he passes over to spirituality. This world is the world of objectivization, of determinism, of alienation, of hostility, of law. While the other world is the world of spirituality, of freedom, love, kinship.<sup>34</sup>

The point is not that Berdyaev uses dualistic conceptualizations, but how he uses them in describing reality.

The fact that dualism is a "difference in mode of existence" is one for which Berdyaev offers further explanation. This dualism can be transcended, as implied in the statement above. So dualistic existence is the state described in the myth of the fall, a condition for which there is eschatological hope. Berdyaev describes this fallen,

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 254.

dualistic existence as resulting from the activity of human consciousness.

Personality builds up its consciousness out of the depths as a defensive base, or as a frontier line which prevents mingling and dissolution; but it is possible for consciousness to prevent the filling of my personality with universal content, and hinder communion with the cosmic whole. . Consciousness arises in the relation between the ego and the non-ego, it denotes a going out from the ego, but at the same time it may be a hinderance to the going out of the I to the Thou as inward communion. It objectifies and may prevent the process of transcending. . The very structure of consciousness readily produces slavery.<sup>35</sup>

This statement provides an analysis which is helpful in understanding the problem of dualism and of evil. Consciousness is an important function of personality for distinguishing between self and other. His words "as a frontier line which prevents mingling and dissolution," are both picturesque and interesting in light of the Perlsian view of consciousness (p. 62ff). Yet this very important activity brings in the possibility of breakdown in the essential solidarity of cosmic reality. As he describes it elsewhere, "Thinking begins to present itself as something other than itself. The subject is converted into an object."<sup>36</sup> Here enters into the universe another world or realm, a fallen one. A division or split has occurred, hence the dualism in human experience.

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>36</sup>Berdyayev, the Beginning and The End, p. 6.

In this scheme, evil is not a cosmic-order reality independent of human experience. "Evil is above all the loss of integrality; it is a breaking away from the spiritual centre, and the formation of autonomous parts which begin to carry on an independent existence of their own."<sup>37</sup>

The resolution of the problem of evil and of dualism lies in the passage through the transition stage. Beyond consciousness which produces objectivization is a state which transcends the division. Berdyaev refers to this state as the "awakening of super-consciousness or of the higher consciousness."<sup>38</sup> This requires a change in the structure of consciousness which he insists is not only possible, but is the duty or burden of carrying out human freedom.<sup>39</sup>

To understand the dualism of Berdyaev's thought is to understand what he is attempting to say about human nature. Dualism is the explanation for the tragedy in human experience. Within the very achievement of the person; the creating, microcosmic, integral center; comes (by means of consciousness) a blockage to full, subject-ive participation in the ground.

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<sup>37</sup>Berdyaev, The Divine and the Human, p. 93.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 198.

<sup>39</sup>Berdyaev, Slavery and Freedom, p. 69.

### 3. Personality, God and the World

Berdyaev's response to the tragedy of dualism is worked out in his christology and eschatology. Here he reveals his thought about the dynamic interrelationship between God and the world. Commonalities between God and human personality have been noted essentially in their spirituality or base in ultimate freedom which includes the attribute of creativity. The intimate relationship and interdependence of God and human persons is brought to its pinnacle in the concept of the Christ.

For Berdyaev, the essential christological notion is the God/man. In Christ is revealed both the humanity of God and the divinity of humankind. Here is stated this concept and the fact of its religious and ethical significance:

One cannot repeat often enough that revelation is divine-human, that Christianity is the religion of God/manhood, that it assumes belief not only in God but of man as well. Thus only can the tragic destiny of Christianity in history be understood. In the fine words of Franz Baader, man wanted to be without God, but God did not want to be God without man, and therefore became Man.<sup>40</sup>

The Christ not only reveals the true relationship of divinity to humanity, that a hyphenated or communal one; he also reveals the meaning of the causal world and history. This is to be understood through the model of the God/man in which transformation is begun of the divisions of human

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<sup>40</sup>Berdyaev, The Divine and the Human, p. 21.

experience. The Christ is the herald and beginner of the new age. Berdyaev states: "In Christ the God/Man and in the divine-human process, the transfiguration of the whole cosmos is being made ready."<sup>41</sup> The implication is that history is to be understood eschatologically, having meaning when transfigured by the inbreaking of a nonhistorical reality. Within human consciousness this transfiguration implies a new perspective or way of perceiving the world. This also results in a new ethic. In the following statement Berdyaev suggests the basis of this new ethic.

The ethics of the human, the ethics of personalism, must be constructed upon an attitude which regards man, personality, as the highest value, it must be founded upon the unrepeatably individual and not on the impersonal common. The new ethic of the new man will above all be an ethic of creativeness, not of law; of the creativeness of man and of the human, not the creativeness of a being which is no longer man, the human is connected with spirituality.<sup>42</sup>

If not already clear, it should be so from this statement that the personality or the person in his or her centered core is the singular figure in the whole panoply of Berdyaev's thought. The person's value is ultimate and determinative of how Berdyaev understands the metaphysical ground as well as the particulars of the world and its meaning. The new ethic is an eschatological ethic. It is rooted in exercising creativity toward the Kingdom of God, the

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 127.



Kingdom within which is realized the meaning of the God/man, the union of grace and freedom. Berdyaev is so insistent upon the position of personality and interpreting the meaning of history in light of personalism, that he states that Christianity is more properly understood as a religion of the realization of the Kingdom "for individual, social and cosmic transfiguration"<sup>43</sup> than it is as a religion of salvation.

#### 4. Review of Freedom in Light of Personalism

The first section of this chapter examines the significance to a concept of freedom that is given by a positing of freedom itself as a chief and underlying metaphysical principle. It seems appropos to examine the contributions to the notion of freedom which come from Berdyaev's anthropology, before going further into the kindred concept of creativity.

In personality, freedom is the source of what we experience as the choosing, acting, determining self. The positing of a center of human experience other than simple determination by environment means freedom. Berdyaev has carried this fact to its ultimate possible conclusion. Freedom is the ground or principle out of which human activity happens and is possible. As Berdyaev suggests, this is

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<sup>43</sup>Berdyaev, The Realm of Spirit..., p. 93.

more than simplistic choosing between obvious options which could rationally be determined to be no choice at all.

"Freedom means not only freedom of choice, but choice itself."<sup>44</sup> Freedom, being a part of the fabric of personality, is reflected in the essentials of what the person or self is and does as integral, microcosm, and creator.

The interface of human nature with the realm of time, space and materiality, as well as the realm of freedom, brings the possibility of misperceiving the personal microcosmic nature of reality. Through consciousness, subjects become objects; energy or power becomes force; freely chosen act or event becomes necessity. The fall, whether understood as pride or sloth, is self-deception (self-created misperception). Evil is a possibility of freedom.

Another possibility of freedom for humankind is the transcending of the dualism of subject and object, of good and evil. This hope made possible out of freedom (not only for humankind, but for the cosmos as well) is actualized only by an "act of freedom and heroism."<sup>45</sup> This other side of personality is modeled by God as person, understood as creator. The transfiguration into the realm of spirit, into the Kingdom of God, is first a creative act which changes the structure of consciousness itself. It is a

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<sup>44</sup>Berdyayev, The Fate of Man..., p. 46.

<sup>45</sup>Berdyayev, Slavery and Freedom, p. 157.

returning to integrality of what was split, as symbolized in the God/man -- the union of grace and freedom. Freedom in and of itself is not graceful, in fact it may be terrible. The fall of dualism is a transitional stage in the possibility of the transfiguring of freedom.

Berdyayev does not speak at great length of love. It is at this point that what he has to say becomes meaningful in the understanding of freedom. His definition of love fits with the idea of a change in the structure of consciousness, "It is the vision of a person through the crust of objectivity. In other words, it is the overcoming of objectivization."<sup>46</sup> Love, understood as tied to the change in the structure of consciousness, becomes one of the correctives to the terrible open-ended-ness of freedom in human personality. This is brought together with the notion of truth in the following statement:

Freedom must be loving and love must be free. It is only the gathering together of freedom, truth and love which realizes personality, free and creative personality. The exclusive affirmation of one of these principles only always introduces distortion, and injures human personality. Each one of the principles can in and by itself be a source of seduction and slavery. Freedom which is given a wrong direction may be a source of slavery. In the objectivization of the spirit the higher is dragged downwards and adjusted; but in creative incarnation of spirit the lower matter of this world is raised; and a change takes place in world data.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>Berdyayev, The Beginning and the End, p. 246.

<sup>47</sup>Berdyayev, Slavery and Freedom, p. 254.

One final implication, freedom's being a spiritual rather than material or social reality means that it is experienced as much as burden as it is a liberation. The carrying out of the charter of freedom by fulfilling personality means conflict with the world of objectivization. Enslavement to the material-social world is easy. "The self-realization of personality pre-supposes resistance."<sup>48</sup>

### C. THE CREATIVE FORMATION

#### 1. Creativity as a Key to the Meaning of Freedom

In much of the preceeding analysis, the role of creativity in Berdyaev's thought must have seemed to run counterpoint to the theme of freedom. God is known chiefly as creator, and the notion is one of the important aspects of human personality as well. The transfiguration of freedom is a matter of creation whether freedom is thought of as cosmic ground, or as root and source of what is personal in humankind, or both. In this section some dimensions of creativity's being an important window to understanding freedom will be explored, including statements on the role of creativity in human nature and in the divine/human task. As Berdyaev puts it, "The true problem of freedom is that of

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

creativity.<sup>49</sup>

In beginning, creativity of all sorts involves an element of the mysterious metaphysical freedom. For a glimpse into this interconnection, notice the way in which Berdyaev handles the traditional idea of God's creation ex nihilo:

Creativeness cannot be merely creation out of nothing, it presupposes the material which the world supplies. But the element of 'out of nothing' does enter into creative activity. For it is creativeness out of the freedom of the other world. This means that what is most important, most mysterious and most creatively new, comes not from 'the world' but from spirit.<sup>50</sup>

Creation is a personal activity (divine/human) in which some new reality emerges. New emergence means becoming a part of the world of being, while having a source as a form which is prior to being or outside being. Creativity is an appropriation from freedom resulting in a new element within the world of time and space. Included in this process of creativity is the self-creative activity of the human person. It is this self-creative activity which moves out to meet the universal content and, in "a synthesizing creative act"<sup>51</sup> emerges as a unique, integral form.

In the ordinary human experience of liberation,

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<sup>49</sup>Berdyaev, The Realm of Spirit. . ., p. 104.

<sup>50</sup>Berdyaev, The Beginning and the End, p. 173.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 172.

freedom is related to creativity in significant ways. "Creativeness is liberation from slavery. Man is free when he finds himself in a state of creative activity. Creativeness leads to ecstasy of the moment. The products of creativeness are within time, but the creative act itself lies outside time."<sup>52</sup> In this fact lies the heart of creativity's being the crucial embodiment of human freedom in the world. Freedom is a metaphysical category, an existential reality. It is known and realized in human experience in personal creative acts including self-creation. As such, it is over against the dragging enslavement of the objectivized world. "Personality in its essence is not submissive and obedient. It is resistance, an unbroken creative act."<sup>53</sup> It is therefore, "the revelation of power,"<sup>54</sup> that is, the inbreaking source of human power and energy.

Creativity also takes on significance in its role for the world at large. This will be discussed in succeeding paragraphs related to Berdyaev's eschatology. We catch a glimpse of his perspective in the following statement about the forms of the world in their relationship to the value of beauty and to the ongoing creative process:

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<sup>52</sup>Berdyaev, Slavery and Freedom, p. 253.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>54</sup>Berdyaev, The Realm of Spirit. . ., p. 106.

The relations between form and infinite content of life are contradictory and paradoxical. Without form there is no beauty, formlessness is unsightly and it may be an ugly thing. The creative force of life ought to receive form. This is to be seen in the processes of nature, in the shaping of the cosmos. But form may become hardened and ossified, it may extinguish the creative fire of life, it may cool down, it may set limits to it. Then the creative fire must break up the forms which have become stiff and numb and stream out towards the infinite content.<sup>55</sup>

This statement suggests the direction of the ethics of personalism in relation to human purpose and activity in the world. It is also a clue to the importance of creativity, and therefore freedom, in Berdyaev's perspective on the natural world.

More is to be said of creativity; it is appropriate at this point to review the significant factors in its being a key to the meaning of freedom. Creativity is the very heart of all that freedom means. Positing freedom as a metaphysical category with a primary role in the cosmic drama is positing the crucial importance of potentiality -- vast, unimagined, and unimaginable. In persons this is manifested as capacity or ability. Abstract ability or capacity makes no sense when speaking of persons. It is a useful notion only when it is ability to do, to preceive, or to become; in other words to create. Hence, creativity is virtually the definition of freedom other than in its myth-

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<sup>55</sup>Berdyaev, The Divine and the Human, pp. 142-3.

ical character. Conversely, one catches a glimpse of the depth of the idea of creativity when understanding its roots in this primary, ultimately mysterious reality -- freedom.<sup>56</sup>

## 2. Creativity and Human Nature

Further exploration involves grappling with what freedom, understood in terms of creativity, means in the human realm. To be persons means to be creators. To be creators, and creation begins with self-creation, means to move in that irrational cosmic realm of freedom, taking what is not into the emergence of what is becoming. Freedom is involved in this creative process in choosing and knowing; we are microcosms and we put the universe together for ourselves in some unique way. Creativity may well be shown in work with a medium, but the creation can not be described fully in material or causal terms. Creativity is holistic and spiritual, as a new form has emerged.

Creativity is not simply synonymous with freedom, although in humankind the character of freedom is revealed

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<sup>56</sup>Charles Hartshorne tells us that Berdyaev's category of freedom is close to Whitehead's creativity. Both are ultimate principles, while neither has ontological reality. (Berdyaev would remind us that freedom is prior to being.) This points not only to the potential closeness of some aspects of their thought, but also reaffirms some particular points of the essential unity in the concept of freedom and that of creativity. Charles Hartshorne, "Whitehead and Berdyaev: Is There Tragedy in God?" Journal of Religion, XXXVII (April 1957), pp. 71-83.



in creativity. Creativity combines both freedom and the integrality of the personality. In this it is shown that we are not only the children of the Ungrund, we are also the children of God. In this context the paradigm of the Christ or God/man and the idea of divine/humanity take on fuller meaning. The paradigm of the God/man is one of full realization of divine/human creativity and freedom. In the God/man freedom is transfigured; the split between subjectivity and objectivity is transcended; the creative potential of spirit in humankind is actualized. In the Christ the burden of freedom experienced in tragedy is fully borne by both God and mankind; personality is fulfilled and completed in a new emergent consciousness of the Kingdom. Christ is the paradigm for the emerging anthropological figure; the liberator from the bonds of the realm of Caesar. Divine/humanity is a matter of the creative act, transfiguring freedom into a form of beauty or grace.

Creative acts span the range from self-creation of personality to creation of works in culture. The creation of the artist is highly regarded by Berdyaev, as is shown in this statement:

This is the meaning of art, of art of any kind. And creative power has an exchatological element in it. It is an end of this world and a beginning of the new world. The world is created not by God only, but also by man. Creation is a divine-human work. And the crowning point of world creation is the end of this world. The world must be turned into an image of beauty, it must be dissolved into

creative ecstasy.<sup>57</sup>

This high regard for the artistic is in the context of Berdyaev's eschatology. It is also true that creation involves tragedy. This tragedy is a part of the ossifying of the fire of the creative act, the fact of humanity's also being creature. It involves the time, space and consciousness-bound aspects of human existence.

In the notion of creativity and in its involvement in tragedy is to be found the beginning of the problem of evil. Evil arises with creativity out of freedom. The personality, we recall, creates itself as a microcosm, a center of the universe. These generative and integral capacities are its inheritance from its cosmic roots in freedom and God. In building consciousness a distinction is made between the integrating, creating personality and the 'other.' It is, in fact, this distinction that is consciousness. At the same time, this need not necessarily result in the objectification of the other. The distinction can be held and also transcended in an act of super-consciousness. This also is a creative act, one which combines free awareness of the objective/subjective distinction with increased awareness of the integral character of the self-creative act.

This is an instant of transfiguration which moves

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<sup>57</sup> Berdyaev, The Beginning and the End, p. 174.

beyond good and evil. It has ethical implications. "It is only Christianity which requires a human attitude to one's enemy, which demands love for one's enemies."<sup>58</sup> It is also a moment of inbreaking eschatological significance. "A society without objects, in which no man or thing will be treated as an object, such a society will, indeed, be the kingdom of spirit and freedom; and in a sense it will be the coming of the Kingdom of God."<sup>59</sup> Such is the dynamic of creativity.

### 3. Creativity and the Divine/Human Task

Berdyaev has spoken of creativity as the divine/human work or task. The continuing creation is the work of both humankind and God. This is so important in his understanding of the meaning of existence that it becomes more central to him than the doctrine of salvation. "The mystery of redemption has, as it were, veiled-over the creative mystery of man."<sup>60</sup> Redemption is but a step on the way to full participation in divine/human co-creativity. This idea enlightens and is enlightened by (in a holistic way) his understandings of the Christ, of personality, of art, and of

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<sup>58</sup> Berdyaev, The Divine and the Human, p. 116.

<sup>59</sup> Berdyaev, Spirit and Reality, p. 63.

<sup>60</sup> Nicolai A. Berdyaev, The Meaning of the Creative Act (New York: Harper & Row, 1955), p. 82.

eschatology. Consider the following:

Feuerbach's atheism is an outstanding reproach to the Old Christian consciousness, to theological doctrines which insisted on obedience rather than on Christian love; for it was the duty of Christians to have affirmed the truths discovered by Feuerbach. Love is creativeness, knowledge is creativeness, the transfiguration of nature is creativeness, freedom is creativeness.<sup>61</sup>

But pure Christianity does not repudiate the cosmic world as such, but only the world of untruth, falsehood, hate, slavery and sin. And, moreover, it insists on the necessity of transforming this world, of discovering the Kingdom of God.<sup>62</sup>

The divine/human task is one of discovery of the wholeness and beauty of the Kingdom in the midst of the world of history and nature. This is the creative activity of personality; it is only the potential of an actuality which is grounded in freedom. Chief among values for personalities are beauty and integrality. The two are closely related and might also be described in terms of grace. In human relationships they are love.

The character of human freedom is capacity, as shown in the creative personality (the paradigm for which is the God/man). Capacity or ability is not just a 'blessing'; it is a fact. It is part and parcel of what it means to be human, the very definition of personality. Berdyaev asserts that freedom is more than a right, it is a

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<sup>61</sup>Berdyaev, Spirit and Reality, pp. 170-1.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., pp. 194-5.

burden. Our creativity is frightening and we usually recoil from it. Those who truly take upon themselves their own freedom, the essential power in their personalities, must be in conflict with much that is valued in the world and must bear the tragedy of being creators.

The end of the world is a divine-human enterprise, the activity and the creative work of man also enters into it. Man not only endures the end, he also prepares for it. The end is not merely the destruction of the world, and judgment, it is also the illumination and transformation of the world, the continuation, as it were, of creation, the entry upon a new aeon. The creative act of man is needed for the coming of the Kingdom of God, God is in need of and awaits it. The future coming of Christ presupposes that the way has been prepared for it by man. And, therefore, we can think of the end only in terms of a dual tension and antinomy. The end is a spiritual event which takes place in existential time. When we project the end upon the time of this world and objectify it in history, the end divides into two and may present itself alike as pessimistic and optimistic, as destruction and construction.<sup>63</sup>

#### D. IN RETROSPECT: REVELATION OF THE CHARACTER OF HUMAN FREEDOM

##### 1. Capacity

Simplifying Berdyaev's contribution to the understanding of human freedom to the single concept of capacity may be deceptive. If Berdyaev's contribution is a revelation, the disclosure of a truth in a new form, then too

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<sup>63</sup>Berdyaev, The Beginning and the End, pp. 251-2.

much is lost in making simple concepts bear all the freight of that disclosure. Revelation has a mysterious quality for it transcends our symbolization of it. Still, in this final section of the chapter on Berdyaev, an attempt is made to lift out a few key elements of the character of freedom for humanity. These stand as catalysts to reopening the vision of what freedom means, rather than as confining definitions. Capacity or potentiality is the definitive element.

Really new life is created, not by the fact of man's setting before himself external aims in the realization of which he acquiesces in, and is even compelled to make use of criminal means, but by this above all, that he radiates from within, from his own self, a gracious transfiguring creative energy.<sup>64</sup>

Freedom can be an illusive, abstract idea which is terribly misunderstood and confusing. Connecting it with 'energy' in Berdyaev's statement can be a means of making sense of it. Human freedom is experienced as internal energy. In the raw sense it is simply ability, which is used in all sorts of ways, for all kinds of purposes, with various results. In the fully actualized or divine/human sense it is gracious, transfiguring, and creative. The freedom is the potentiality.

## 2. Ultimate and Irrational

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<sup>64</sup>Berdyaev, The Divine and the Human, p. 191.

If the human conceptualization, 'freedom', can be frightfully illusive and abstract, in Berdyaev's thought that is a reflection of its metaphysical character. Cosmic freedom is ultimate and irrational. Even in speaking of human freedom its character has ultimate and irrational elements.

The source of human integrative energy is baffling. Each discipline in knowledge has a different approach to explaining it. Is it attributable to sexual drive as in one psychological point of view, or to chemical energy derivative from food sources as in a possible biological perspective? At best these can tell us only something of 'how' the energy functions; they cannot suggest 'why'. No such explanation, nor all together, can have the last word; for the source of subjective, human, integrative, creative energy is mysterious. It has an irrational element. That is to say it is deep. "There can be no rational interpretation of freedom; a rational definition would only kill freedom."<sup>65</sup>

At the same time that human freedom is deep, it is also boundless. Perhaps 'beyond bounds' is more accurate, for it is an ultimate category. It is the source of all polar elements and even for polarities themselves. It is the Non-Being from which Being emerges and against which

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<sup>65</sup>Berdyaev, Spirit and Reality, p. 113.

only does Being make sense. Expressions of human freedom and experiences of human freedom have a prophetic and eschatological quality. This, too, is due to the ultimate element in freedom's character; "in it (the creative act) this world comes to an end, and another world begins."<sup>66</sup>

### 3. Fact and Choice

Berdyaev revealed that human freedom is a matter of fact and choice. The fact of freedom has to do with its being an inextricable part of what a person is, an integrative, microcosmic center or a creator. Put crudely, there is no way to escape freedom; we are free whether we like it or not. This expression may also show some of the reason for freedom's being experienced as a burden. To have capacity is part of what it means to be a person. Berdyaev shows his bias as to the general human response to this personal power in saying, "People love slavery and authority. The mass of mankind has no love for freedom, and is afraid of it."<sup>67</sup>

This implies that a person may choose to avoid the fact of freedom. Although capacity is a given, a person may choose not to respond to it. Choice is also an element of human freedom. Choice and fact are bound together in

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<sup>66</sup>Berdyaev, The Beginning and the End, p. 179.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 216.



that a person is proving the fact of freedom even in choosing to avoid it. Choosing is itself a capacity. Choice is not a matter of decision-making in a limited sense. It is a matter of deciding as in 'one chooses a path as one takes the first step.' Choice is a creative act. It is a fact that persons have the capacity for choice, for creative activity, and this is an aspect of their freedom.

#### 4. Toward Beauty and Integrality

Beauty is a characteristic of the highest qualitative state of being, of the highest attainment of existence; it is not a separate side of existence. . . . If a thing is perceived and accepted by man integrally, as a whole, that precisely is beauty. . . . An element of beauty lies in all congruity. Beauty is the final goal of the world and of man.<sup>68</sup>

Beauty and its accompanying quality, integrality, are the proper end for personal freedom. They are not elements of freedom in the pure sense, for freedom is also terrible and chaotic. Yet when considering personal freedom, and the whole idea of freedom as a source of integral creative power, they do belong as central aspects. Beauty is a matter of form and content. It is usually thought of in terms of cultural expression such as in the fine arts. So it should be, as the arena for a person's creative acts is his or her environment. At the same time, beauty can seemingly be exclusively personal. Normally this is called

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<sup>68</sup>Berdyayev, The Divine and the Human, p. 139.

integrality rather than beauty. The two are of the same essence. "If a thing is perceived and accepted by man integrally, as a whole, that precisely is beauty." (See above.)

In one of the earliest of his works, The Meaning of the Creative Act, Berdyaev pointed to the elements of the character of human freedom. He indicated ideas which he spent a lifetime developing. In the following statements he implies the awesome power of these elements; capacity, ultimacy, irrationality, factuality, choice, beauty and integrality. The final statement again couches human freedom in terms of its eschatological impact.

The degree of responsibility for this death-bound condition of nature depends upon the degree of freedom and upon the hierarchic place in the cosmos.

Man must give back spirit to the stones, reveal the living nature of stones, in order to free himself from their stoney, oppressing power.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>69</sup>Berdyaev, The Meaning of the Creative Act, p. 71.

## Chapter II

### THE CHARACTER OF RESPONSIBILITY IN THE THOUGHT AND WORK OF FREDERICK S. PERLS

#### A. THE ANALYSIS OF THE CREATIVE ACT

##### 1. Gestalt Formation and the Organism/Environment Field

The supremacy of Frederick S. Perl's model of human personality lies in the fact that it is dynamic, organismic, and holistic, yet very precise as compared to most theoretical models of the self. It encompasses in one theory human feelings, behavior, perceptions, and thoughts; integrating both physical and psychological aspects. The basic unity lies in the concept of the gestalt.

The term gestalt means whole. Closure, completion, and unity are similar ideas; that which has a unique form is irreducible without its loss. The idea is a field theory. The field is a universe as in mathematical terminology. It includes all of the possible givens in a particular situation. A field is designated by the hyphen or slash naming the particular case, called the figure, and the universe, called the ground.

The broadest field for gestalt therapy is what is termed the organism/environment field.

Let us call this interacting of organism and environment in any function the 'organism/environment

field'; and let us remember that no matter how we theorize about impulses, drives, etc., it is always to such an interacting field that we are referring, and not to an isolated animal. The human organism/environment is, of course, not only physical but social.<sup>1</sup>

It is illuminative of the power of these conceptualizations to recall that common human thought and language suggests a significant inaccuracy. We tend to think in terms of human beings as self-contained and isolatable units. But when does the water I drink cease to be environment and become me? Is the oxygen in my blood a part of me or the environment? What of that in my lungs? And what of the waste material I am exhaling?

Explanation of yet another concept should be helpful. Human experience occurs at what is called the contact boundary. It is simply the dominant point of interaction or contact between organism and environment at any particular moment. The contact boundary defines the emerging gestalt or figure/ground formation in the organism/environment field. Awareness takes place on the contact boundary. What is felt is the interchange. When I am hungry I am aware of food or the lack of it. "We select objects according to our

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<sup>1</sup>Frederick S. Perls, Ralph E. Hefferline, and Paul Goodman, Gestalt Therapy (New York: Dell, 1951), p. 228.

interests, and these appear as prominent figures against a dim background."<sup>2</sup> This language suggests visual contact; it can apply to other sensual or emotional and social perceptions as well.

An example will serve to clarify the concepts suggested thus far. Perls refers to the ordinary experience of thirst. The body needs a certain amount of water. The whole person is ordered in its quest. Water which previously was uninteresting is now bright and attractive. The body moves toward it, as the figure, water, emerges with increasing clarity. The person may become conscious in thought, "I'm thirsty." As water is consumed the multivariate experience called thirst decreases. A drinking fountain is again uninteresting. The organism is momentarily at rest. The gestalt, as the term is ordinarily used, includes the total interaction. The gestalt is now completed. A new figure may now emerge from the ground.

All of the "parts" of the described experience are aspects of the unique particular event or whole. The sequential way in which it was related suggests a cause-effect relationship, and that is misleading.

As a boundary of interaction, its sensitivity, motor response, and feeling are turned both toward the environment-part and the organism-part. Neuroligic-

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<sup>2</sup>Frederick S. Perls, Ego, Hunger, and Aggression,  
(New York: Random House, 1947), p. 41.

ally, it has receptors and proprioceptors. But in act, in contact, there is given a single whole of perception-initiating movement tinged with feeling. It is not that the self-feeling, for instance of being thirsty, serves as a signal that is noted, referred to the water-perception department, etc.; but that in the same act the water is given as bright-desirable-movement toward, or<sup>3</sup> the absence of water is absent-irksome-problematic.

Within this theoretical framework Perls speaks of the self-boundary which is the contact boundary as the person experiences it. The self can be considered the experiencing center of the organism. That is, it is the integrator of the experience of contact or the figure/ground former. It is the gestalt former, and its 'life' is on the boundary. It is rarely, if ever, aware of itself as a center, but rather aware of what is occurring in the sensitive areas of thought, emotion or sensation in the succession of formulating boundaries.

Now if we are willing to stay in the center of our world, and not have the center either in our computer or somewhere else, but really in the center, then we are ambidextrous--then we see the two poles of every event. We see that light cannot exist without non-light. If there is sameness, you can't be aware anymore. If there is always light, you don't experience light anymore. You have to have the rhythm of light and darkness.<sup>4</sup>

This experiencing center or self-boundary potentially extends outward virtually infinitely into the environment--part from the usually-thought-of-organism--

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<sup>3</sup>Perls, Gestalt Therapy, p. 260.

<sup>4</sup>Frederick S. Perls, Gestalt Therapy Verbatim, (New York: Bantam, 1969), p. 18.

the body. The self or experiencing center is the person. Persons may be considered the historically continuous gestalts (gestalt experiences) integral to a particular human organism. Note that the gestalt includes the environment in interaction with the organism; it is the form of boundary figure in the organism/environment field. Also note that in the statements to this point, Perls has been referring to the situation where the contact boundary is allowed to emerge freely on the basis of the organism's dominant need or response. This is organismic self-regulation<sup>5</sup> as opposed to self-conquest.<sup>6</sup> The distinction is important for it tells us of the capacity of the self to give over the gestalt formation process to standards other than the dominant organismic need or response in the maintenance of its delicate balance.

## 2. Destruction and Construction: A Psychology of Eating

The gestalt is a whole. It is an integrated, irreducible reality. Perls has seen fit to describe several aspects of the gestalt formation process. This is done from the clinical perspective of examining how the formation of completed, full gestalts is hampered or broken down.

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<sup>5</sup>Perls, Gestalt Therapy, p. 275.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 362.

It is to be remembered that these are not parts into which the gestalt can be dissected. They present a cycle which is Perls' conception of what is involved in the gestalt formation process. The cycle is delineated in these six links in one of his early works:

- (1) The organism at rest.
- (2) The disturbing factor, which may be (a) internal or (b) external.
- (3) Creation of image or reality (plus/minus function and figure-background phenomenon).
- (4) The answer to the situation aiming at
- (5) A decrease of tension, resulting in
- (6) Return of the organismic balance.<sup>7</sup>

The condition of balance refers to a state of rest prior to the emergence of an organismic need or response (to an environmental condition).

This dynamic model is based on what might be called a psychology of eating. The potency of this model for religion should be recognized, not only because of the symbol of the eucharistic meal, but also because consumption as interactive participation with an environment includes all basic life and death processes such as breathing. Changes in the organism/environment field involve destruction and construction processes. This means that the model could be informative to the full spectrum of ethical questions.

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<sup>7</sup>Perls, Ego, Hunger, and Aggression, p. 69.



The typical organism/environment interaction is a destroying (Perls sometimes says de-structuring)<sup>8</sup> of an environmental object into elements for construction which meets an organism's needs. The gestalt is not complete until something is changed. In the paradigm of eating, de-structuring the unassimilatable object and assimilation of the needed elements are key concepts in the process. They fit into the cycle above as: The experience of hunger (2), the aggressive contact with and destruction of food (3) and (4), the assimilation of valued elements and passing on those not usable (5). The cycle completions are the at-rest states between gestalt formation. The following passage reviews this aspect of the creative act of gestalt formation and indicates some of the aberrations in healthy functioning.

Destroying, on the contrary, is a function of appetite. Every organism in a field grows by incorporating, digesting, and assimilating new matter, and this requires destroying the existing form to its assimilable elements, whether it be food, a lecture, a father's influence, the difference between a mate's domestic habits and one's own. The new matter must be accepted only according to its place in a new spontaneous functioning. If the previous form is not totally destroyed and digested, there occurs, instead of assimilation, either introjection or areas of no contact. The introject may have two fates: either it is vomited forth (a kind of annihilation); or the self partially identifies with the introject, represses the pain, seeks to annihilate parts of the self--but since the rejection is ineradicable, there is permanent clinch, a neurotic splitting.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Perls, Gestalt Therapy, p. 340.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 232.

The introjects and other major malfunctions will be examined later. At this point note that the therapeutic process in gestalt therapy is a matter of relearning the beautiful functioning of the gestalting process in order that unfinished gestalts from the past may be fully assimilated, the splits reintegrated.

By working on the unity and disunity of this structure of the experience here and now, it is possible to remake the dynamic relations of the figure and ground until the contact is heightened, the awareness brightened and the behavior energized. Most important of all, the achievement of a strong gestalt is itself the cure, for the figure on contact is not a sign of, but is itself the creative integration of experience.<sup>10</sup>

### 3. Time and Space

In gestalt theory the relevant material is what is occurring in the momentary interaction in the organism/environment field. This is the particular, present-moment event. This is like Berdyaev's existential moment and, indeed, gestalt therapy is considered an existential therapy. Perls makes this explicit and indicates something of the present's relationship to the past and the future in the following excerpts:

The time centre of ourselves as conscious human time-space events is the present. There is no other reality than the present....When we remember,

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 232.

we remember at that very second and to certain purposes; when we think of the future we anticipate things to come, but we do so at the present moment and from various causes. . . What I want to bring home is, that past and future take their bearings continuously from the present and have to be related to it.<sup>11</sup>

Memory of the past, as well as thought of the future, do not re-enact those events as they were or will be. They are themselves here and now creations, colored and shaped by the multi-faceted present moment.

Spatial reality is similarly explicit, but not always easily graspable. What is valid or given in an interaction is the immediate contact surface-boundary. We are so accustomed to considering the physical body the 'outer' limit of the organism, that 'here' seems to imply points immediately adjacent to my skin. When in fact, the 'here' of my aware center may at this moment involve the tree I am seeing which is objectively half a block away.

The definition of an organism is the definition of an organism/environment field; and the contact-boundary is, so to speak, the specific organ of awareness of the novel situation of the field, as contrasted, for instance, with the more internal "organic" organs of metabolism or circulation that function conservatively without the need for awareness, deliberateness, selection or avoidance of novelty.<sup>12</sup>

#### 4. Some Implications of the Co-functioning, Hyphenated Field

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<sup>11</sup>Perls, Ego, Hunger, and Aggression, pp. 92,93.

<sup>12</sup>Perls, Gestalt Therapy, p. 259.

Examining the concept of the formation of wholes as the atomistic process of the human personality, we see much that is fruitful for relating to Berdyaev's perspective. That will be done in the following chapter. Here we note some possibilities and implications of Perls' concept of human creative acts.

The gestalt moves beyond the distinction between subject and object. Perls is definite about this and other splits in human consciousness.<sup>13</sup> The gestalt process is integrative in character, a synthesis as opposed to analysis. In the interaction of the organism/environment field there is a center of experience, the person. As I am aware of myself tasting water I may have the distinct experience of at-one-ness of lips, tongue, throat, and water. The water becomes an aspect of myself. Distinctions between subject and object are made for a purpose in human thought and language. Sometimes they are useful. They can also be misleading as reality is not so purely divided. In the experience of transcendence, especially accompanying completion of a gestalt, may come that microcosmic sensation of unity with the universe known as satori.<sup>14</sup> This is an eschatological event transcending the common distinction between

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Perls, Gestalt Therapy Verbatim, p. 43.

"self" and "other".

Another aspect significant in gestalt theory is the fact of ever recurring completion and newness. New creation occurs and is finished. It is then past and merely a fact in the universe, already old and of diminished value. It is the newly emerging gestalt which is of existential importance. Another set of ideas in gestalt formation which parallels completion and newness is integration and motion. The experienced gestalt is a whole. One may focus on a particular aspect, but feelings, awareness, behavior and perception come together. There is motion as a new gestalt emerges on the rest-ground of the completed one.

The gestalt formation process also has implications for values and valuation. The field interactions are an evaluating and expressing of those evaluations. If I have been without food for a day, it becomes the valuable exchange for maintenance of the organism/environment field. However, if suddenly I should be without oxygen, its value in the maintenance of the field would supercede that of food, and I would have no awareness of hunger. The dynamics of these analogies apply also to seemingly non-physical phenomena such as the perception of being accepted or loved.

Significant in the gestalt process is choice. In the case of thirst quenching conscious choice may have been hardly recognizable. The person's awareness of choice

(consciously) may be dim, but the choice is made. In the case of an emergency or a situation which calls for deliberation, the conscious awareness of choice will probably be heightened. What is occurring is effort on the part of the person to widen awareness of the ground so as to broaden the richness of possibilities for completion. The point is that the person is a choice maker, determining and evaluating. All of this is more than deliberating or thinking, it has to do with the fact that the person is a creator. This is the self as gestalt former, the active former-integrator of experience.

## B. THE DIALOGUE OF SPIRIT AND CAESAR

### 1. Human Awareness and Functioning

A valuable aspect of gestalt theory is that it is a model of the self for the well-functioning person as well as having applicability to neurotic and psychotic functioning. Gestalt theory attempts to say what the 'healthy' person would be like if there were no blocks to quality gestalt formation. This is not an attempt to describe an ideal personality. Quite the contrary, it is an attempt to describe what a well-functioning gestalting process is like. Even if there were no neuroses, persons and environments differ significantly. When persons tend to respond mechanically in similar patterns it is as likely an indication

of malfunctioning as it is the achievement of some 'ideal' personality.

The gestaltists believe in organismic self-regulation. "We believe that the free interplay of the faculties, concentrating on some present matter, comes not to chaos or mad fantasy but to a gestalt that solves a real problem."<sup>15</sup> The term self-actualization, Perls points out, has been popularized to the point of being misleading. "It has been put forth as a program and achievement. This is the result of reification, the need to make a thing out of a process."<sup>16</sup> This is what is not aimed for in the concept of organismic self-regulation. The following is from the therapeutic perspective and comes closer to what is at stake.

Given all these factors of variation and eccentricity in the patient, it is obviously desirable to have a therapy that establishes a norm as little as possible, and tries to get as much as possible from the structure of the actual situation, here and now.<sup>17</sup>

Even with the desire not to establish norms in therapy, much is explainable in theory about the qualities of full gestalt formation. The process has been reviewed in the previous section, some additional aspects follow in

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<sup>15</sup>Perls, Gestalt Therapy, p. 246.

<sup>16</sup>Frederick S. Perls, In and Out of the Garbage Pail, (New York: Bantam, 1969), p. 5.

<sup>17</sup>Perls, Gestalt Therapy, p. 282.

this one.

The idea of the dominant gestalt has been mentioned as well as the notion of the source of energy in the organism-environment process. Clarification of Perls' understanding of these two adds to the picture of human functioning. In his delightfully humorous autobiography, In and Out of the Garbage Pail, Perls quips: "In the beginning there were some terms, some general terms created by people who know as little as I do about what the specific organismic energy is."<sup>18</sup> After reviewing some of these terms he proceeds:

I like the term excitement. Excitement can be experienced, and it has an affinity to the specific property of protoplasm, excitability. This excitement is provided by the metabolism of organism. That one gestalt which from the survival point of view has the greatest significance gets the most excitement and is thus capable of emerging and using its excitement for orientation and coping.<sup>19</sup>

A part of the organismic self-regulation is experienced as patience. It is the trusting that when a figure needs to emerge, it will emerge; one may well enjoy the experience of rest for excitement does not have to be artificially generated.

The other side of the picture, for Berdyaev as well as for Perls, is the tendency for the person to become enslaved despite this source of magnificent personal

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<sup>18</sup>Perls, In and Out of the Garbage Pail, p. 170.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 171.



energy. The following impresses me as a statement that could have been made by either man, as have many statements made by each. In it Perls suggests more about the sources of quality human functioning.

Everything is preparation, nothing realization and satisfaction. The result is that the problems cannot be worked through and assimilated. . . . After awhile the self loses confidence in its own appetites. There is a lack of faith, for faith is knowing, beyond awareness, that if one takes a step there will be ground underfoot: one gives one self unhesitatingly to the act, one has faith that the background will produce the means.<sup>20</sup>

This not only reiterates that faith in the universe/gestalt process is an important aspect of clear and healthy figure/ground formation, it also suggests the problem that the social environment presents for the human processor. Gestalt therapy places high emphasis on personal responsibility for one's psychological state. Still, it is highly critical of the human social environment. "A large part of psychotherapy is a process of disengaging these properly outside-the-skin forces from meddling inside-the-skin and disturbing the organismic-self regulation."<sup>21</sup> This last statement will be taken as an oversimplification if understood to imply that the person exercised no choice in the matter. It is still the case that there seems to be a sickness in the common human situation. The social environment

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<sup>20</sup>Perls, Gestalt Therapy, p. 343.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

is a powerful aspect of the human condition.

Perhaps Perls was speaking with more precision in saying,

The infectious nature of neurosis is based upon a complicated psychological process, in which feelings of guilt and fear of being an outcast play a part, as well as the wish to establish contact, even if it be pseudo-contact.<sup>22</sup>

It seems that the need for human contact with other humans, and for acceptance by others, tends to become the synthetic pearl of great price. There is also a tendency to wish to hide the fact that one thinks one has paid too dearly, until the fact is no longer even recognizable to oneself.

The discussion has been focusing on sources of mal-function. This is still valuable for understanding human functioning. More explicitly, the gestalting process goes on whether frustrated, incomplete, and poorly; or full, complete, and joyously. Mal-functioning is a kind of functioning. Perls points this out in examining some typical emergency functions of the organism for survival in the face of perceived threat, an extreme example of which is fainting.

Indeed, without being paradoxical one could say that in the neuroses just these safety-functions -- of blotting out, distorting, isolating, repeating -- that seem so spectacularly 'crazy', are working fairly healthily. It is the more respectable functions of orientation and manipulation in the world, especially the social world, that are out of kilter

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<sup>22</sup>Perls, Ego Hunger, and Aggression, p. 62.

and cannot work."<sup>23</sup>

The gestalting process goes on, even when it is ill-used, and even though its natural power is denied. In the neurotic functioning, rather than the environment being manipulated or one's relationship to it reoriented, it is the self which is manipulated and adjusted. The person denies his or her own needs and full creative activity. The situation is contrived rather than negotiated. The self becomes the victim.<sup>24</sup> By contrast: "If you are centered in yourself, then you don't adjust any more -- then whatever happens becomes a passing parade and you assimilate, you understand, you are related to what ever happens."<sup>25</sup> Good functioning is connecting, surveying and digesting keenly and carefully. Doubtlessly this is behind Perls' stressing one factor above all in theory and therapy for the reclamation of strong functioning -- awareness. The following statement is a witness to this self-creative force:

If the self-awareness is an integrative force, then from the beginning the patient is an active partner in the work, a trainee in psychotherapy. And the emphasis is shifted from the rather comfortable sentiment that he is sick to the sentiment that he is learning something, for obviously psychotherapy is a human discipline, a development of Socratic

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<sup>23</sup>Perls, Gestalt Therapy, p. 311.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Perls, Gestalt Therapy Verbatim, p. 32.

dialectic."<sup>26</sup>

## 2. Consciousness, Thinking, and Anxiety.

One of the significant departures in the theory of gestalt therapy from traditional psycho-analytic concepts is its view of consciousness. Consciousness is considered by Perls in its functionality. It serves a vital purpose which has to do with the need for a delay in interaction at the contact-boundary. In a highly complex organism such as the human, the needs for increased versatility, selectivity, and responsiveness call for this delaying function.<sup>27</sup> The functionality can be seen in some selected situations. One situation is when the environment presents dangers to the organism. Another involves the lack of the organism's ability to find a means for maintaining life-sustaining balance. Each of these is an emergency situation in which heightened awareness or selectivity is called forth, hence the heightening of consciousness.

Another function of consciousness involves exhausting "energy which cannot reach equilibrium."<sup>28</sup> The comparison is made of this function of consciousness to Freud's

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<sup>26</sup>Perls, Gestalt Therapy, p. 248.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 259.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 261.

theory of dreams.<sup>29</sup> The function of dreaming, it seems, is to allow the organism to remain relaxed despite the fact that various imbalances and needs continue to arise incessantly. If an imbalance is significant enough the person will awaken and respond. Otherwise the dreaming allows the use of the need-energy (in dream creation) without accompanying organism/environment interaction. "Paradoxically, the dream is completely conscious; this is why it has its flat cinematic quality. The deeper the dream is, the more it lacks the obscure body-feeling of waking perception."<sup>30</sup> In gestalt theory there is not the positing of an unconscious or of unconscious activity. There are simply levels of awareness. Consciousness is a level of awareness which is a part of delay in interaction at the contact-boundary.

It has been suggested that for an organism as sophisticated as the human, consciousness is a valuable function. This is the case especially when it is used as "a contact-function in a difficult organism/environment field."<sup>31</sup> In that event it is crucial to survival. However, consciousness can also be a problem in strong gestalt formation precisely because it is a delay. Once the de-

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 262.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 263.

laying function has a foothold and becomes a normative pattern, it can serve to break down or limit good contact and gestalt completion. In consciousness one can function to shape one's perception of the environment to be dangerous or of the field to be non-need meeting (frustrating). The situation being described is a state of neurosis which Perls calls a condition of "chronic low-grade emergency."<sup>32</sup> In the following he shows the problem of consciousness in neurosis:

Conceive that instead of either the reestablishment of equilibrium or blotting-out and hallucination in a temporary emergency excess of danger and frustration, there exists a chronic low-tension dis-equilibrium, a continual irk of danger and frustration interspersed with occasional accute crises, and never fully relaxed.

This is a dismal hypotheses, but it is unfortunately historical fact for most of us.

The other half of this dismal hypothesis is that the relaxing function of consicousness becomes pushed to its limit in dreaming, daydreaming, projecting, illusions and the like. "Dreaming is spontaneous and undeliberate, but the safeguarding of daydreaming from passing into movement is deliberate."<sup>34</sup> This is a way of understanding the dynamics of self-conquest. Force is exercised by one part of the

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 264.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 265.

self to quell emergent energy in another part.

Thinking is a special case within conscious awareness involving the manipulation of symbols. As such, it carries both the valuable function and possible pitfall of consciousness to more specific extremes. As a tool it allows for abstracting, for establishing categories and making sophisticated hypothetical interactions, and for high levels of communication and learning, among other possibilities. The most common symbols used in thought are verbalizations made subvocally unless actually spoken. Pure thought is a form of creative activity, the dynamics of which resemble play.<sup>35</sup>

The problem with thinking is that 'it' so easily replaces contact or awareness and presents itself as the organism's reality. Then the delay becomes a shift in the whole field; the organism/environment contact-boundary not being the one emergent out of the immediate need or response but rather a hypothetical one being created by the thinker. Typically this is done in the framework of reliving the past or anticipating the future. The originally forming gestalt goes unfinished or 'half-baked'. Thinking also presents abstractions (which are helpful in their own arena) as the primary realities. Hence the deceiving and deceived splits between organism and environment, mind

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 297.

and body, self and other.

Perls has discovered that most thinking is verbal anticipation or rehearsing. One plays out some imagined event or conversation privately in the mind. This discovery leads to a most understandable and helpful concept of anxiety. Anxiety, according to Perls, is:

just stage fright. 'Will my role come off?' 'Will I be called a good boy?' 'Will I get approval?' 'Will I get applause, or will I get rotten eggs?' So that's not an existential choice, just a choice of inconvenience. But to realize that it's just an inconvenience, that it's not a catastrophe, but just an unpleasantness, is part of coming into your own, part of waking up.<sup>36</sup>

A more complete portrayal of Perls' analysis of anxiety reveals its many facets. The verbal anticipation is connected with constricted fear or excitement. Along with the emotion fear or excitement comes the body's mobilization for flight or fight (recall that the organism functions holistically and perceptions, emotions, and physical activity come together). Part of the mobilization is increased breathing. The person recognizes that the increased breathing is inappropriate to the actual 'here and now' situation, so the muscles are constricted to withhold it. Constriction of breathing by itself brings the feeling tones of anxiety for it increases the carbon dioxide in the lungs. That is accompanied by the panicky reaction of oxygen starvation.

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<sup>36</sup>Perls, Gestalt Therapy Verbatim, p. 33.



The experience of anxiety includes all of these factors: rehearsing in thought, fear or excitement repressed by means of shortened breath and constricted muscles, and the sensation of oxygen starvation; all carried out at a 'low-grade emergency' level.<sup>37</sup> It can also be understood in terms of the problem of human self-deception about the nature of time, space, and existence. A change in the condition of anxiety is accomplished (either by fate or by aware choice) by either ceasing the rehearsing or allowing breathing to self-regulate, and ultimately both.

### 3. Perceptions, Attitudes, and Feelings

The gestalt predilection for form, as a crucial aspect of the formation of figure/ground, shows itself in the significance of perception. Perceptions here refer not merely to visual configurations, nor even to configurations of all sense data combined. This same idea of form (significant to the discoveries of gestalt psychology in the field of visual perception) is the heart of the concept of personal perception. The form of a configuration includes the particular figure to emerge from the ground, the way it emerges, the way it stands as figure in relationship to the ground, its receding, and the nature of the ground itself.

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<sup>37</sup>Perls, Gestalt Therapy, pp. 409-411.

The form, then, is determinative of the nature and quality of the whole or gestalt throughout its process for 'formation.' In asking the question of perception, one is being asked about what one 'sees' (form). In visual perception this choice of terms should be fairly straight-forward. It should be no less understandable in other human experiences for the question is: What does the gestalt look like? What is formed?

Perceptions are the factors of primary interest in gestalt theory. Feelings, sense data, thoughts, and behavior are important secondarily as they have their significance in relationship to the form of the whole. An example will illustrate this principle. Imagine oneself seated in a room with a group of six to ten adults, holding a conversation of a sincere nature. A two-year-old child comes in and crawls around untying everyone's shoe laces. Each adult is likely to have a somewhat different perception of what is occurring. Some might 'see' the child as a nuisance, an unwanted intruder doing undesirable things, and react by withdrawing their feet or pushing away. Others might 'see' the child as wanting attention and pick him or her up to play. Others might rush out to find the 'missing' parent. Undoubtedly there would be many variations of response in between. The event in each case was the same, a child untying one's shoes. Yet the perception of what was happening was different. The feelings and behavior of each went

with the perception.

In this understanding the concept of attitude has importance. An attitude is a predisposition or stance which would be one of many shaping factors in the organism/environment's creation of emerging configurations. An example of an attitude would be trust or mistrust when meeting another person. Attitudes present difficulty in functioning when they become fixed or are given too strong a weight in shaping a newly emerging event. This is often the case in neurosis as Perls indicates in this reference to neurotic compulsion:

But the neurotic tension is not completed; yet it is dominant, it must be completed before anything else is attended to; so the organism assumes the same attitude to make the same effort again. Unfortunately, the fixed attitude, which failed before, has become necessarily more inept in the changed circumstances; so that completion is less and less likely. . . .

Thus it is that a present need for a present satisfaction comes to seem 'infantile.' It is not the instinct or the desire that is infantile, no longer relevant to the adult, but that the fixed attitude, its abstract conceptions and images are old-fashioned, unlikely, ineffectual.<sup>38</sup>

Despite their role in neurosis, attitudes are recoverable to conscious awareness and changeable. Although person's usually are not consciously aware of their attitudes, this is by choice, by an act of the person. As predispositions with accompanying 'abstract conceptions and

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 293.

images', attitudes are the creation of the organism. They may be brought to awareness and changed.

Feelings are an aspect of the gestalt. They define the relationship between organism and environment and bear the meaning of the response. That is, the organism needs to 'know' the result of the interaction and the 'source' of its energy. The feeling or emotion is the first signal to that awareness. Speaking with more technical precision: "An emotion is the integrative awareness of a relation between the organism and the environment. (It is the foreground figure of various combinations of proprioceptions and perceptions.) As such it is a function of the field."<sup>39</sup> Emotions go with the other aspects of gestalt formation. Thus, anger accompanies mobilization for attack; grief accompanies withdrawal; love goes with motion to be near; and as was noted concerning anxiety, fear goes with increased breathing and perceived threat.

Emotions or feelings, attitudes, and perceptions have some similarities and occasionally are confused with each other. They are three distinct concepts. The attitude is a pattern or predisposition prior to the emergence of the figure. It rises to shape the gestalt as the figure itself emerges. The perception is the form of the gestalt in

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 407.

the way it is experienced by the organism. The emotion is one function of the gestalt, among others, which serves to clarify the relationship of organism to environment and the nature of the gestalt's energy.

#### 4. Malfunctioning, Impasse, and Recovery

Much of the literature of gestalt therapy has to do with various aspects of malfunctioning. It is not the purpose of this work to survey that. A few samples of the dynamics of malfunctioning, in the common usage -- neurosis, have already been given. In this part a few of the broad concepts will be reviewed, along with some of the means of recovery of full "healthy" functioning. Essentially malfunctioning can be understood as the thwarting, distorting, or blocking of the organismic gestalt formation process. When a gestalt is incomplete, in whatever manner the incompleteness may be described, it is 'unfinished.' As a need or situation which served as a center of energy toward satisfaction, an incomplete gestalt seeks to be finished. The faith of the gestalt therapist is that if allowed to emerge again with sharp contact or clarity, it will complete. That is, after all, the nature of a gestalt. The possible exception to this 'law' of gestalt theory is the situation of frustration in which the environment cannot produce the desired interchange. Even in that event the gestalt may be completed simply by self-redefinition; that

is, taking in new data to change its 'attitude' or desired interchange.

The most common aspect of malfunction is splitting. It takes energy to keep an incompleting gestalt-seeking-completion from emerging to figure/ground clarity again. This is accomplished only by the act of the self. In effect one part of the self is acting to oppose another. This is a split in the person. The means by which the self accomplishes this feat are many. Perls gives effort to developing these in several sources. Perhaps the most extensive listing is in the chapter on "Neurosis" in Ego, Hunger and Aggression. He there orders the many traditional types of neurosis or "means of avoidance" (of contact-awareness) into three main varieties: (a) those "which tend toward annihilation, which have a subtractive function," including selectivity, inhibition, repression; (b) "the plus function -- the hypertrophic growths or additions," including obsessions, complaints, projection; and (c) means which involve "changes and distortions," including feelings of guilt and anxiety, projection and retroflection.<sup>40</sup>

In fact, these categories are not tight and do tend to overlap. In later works he often tends to simplify using the analogy of human eating and his analysis of the gestalt formation process or cycle as points of reference.

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<sup>40</sup>Perls, Ego, Hunger, and Aggression, pp. 65-66.

In the following listing the different types of malfunctions are named and charted on the basis of where they occur as interruptions in the creative formation:

- (1) Before the new primary excitation. Confluence.
- (2) During the excitation. Introjection.
- (3) Confronting the environment. Projection.
- (4) During the conflict and destroying. Retroflection.
- (5) At final contact. Egotism.<sup>41</sup>

Confluence is no-contact, no sense of the boundary (confusion, 'fuzziness', 'fog'). Introjection is taking an element into one's self undigested (swallowing whole). Projection is identifying as the environment's what is one's own, but needs to be broken down and assimilated ('The world hates me' which means I am out of sorts with the world, which means I am not orienting and manipulating well).

Retroflection is explained well in the following:

Suppose now the outgoing energies, of orientation and manipulation, are fully engaged in the environmental situation, whether in love, anger, pity, grief, etc.; but he cannot cope and must interrupt, he is afraid to hurt (destroy), or be hurt; he will necessarily be frustrated: then the engaged energies are turned against the only available safe objects in the field, his own personality and body.<sup>42</sup>

This, in the eating analogy, is biting oneself. Egotism is hanging on to the sense of contact when the assimilation could be self-completing. In egotism, full satisfaction

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 451.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 455.

and assimilation never occurs. Instead of allowing organism and environment to achieve the unity of the field, one fixates upon the power of contact.

As gestalt theory is holistic, certain conceptualizations and patterns keep re-emerging in this linear analysis-discussion. The gestalt formation process cycle (page 50), which was repeated in delineating types of malfunctions (above), parallels Perls' five layers of a neurosis. In this latter model we also see some clues to the therapeutic effort or recovery of healthy functioning. The following is a summary of his description of the structure or layers of a neurosis.

First is the 'cliche' layer, wherein instead of real contact there are 'meaningless tokens of meeting.'<sup>43</sup>

Underneath the cliche layer is the "synthetic" layer. It is the arena of games and roles wherein genuine existence is compromised in the "superficial, social, as-if layers."<sup>44</sup> In this layer can be seen the identification with an unassimilated introject which then becomes a role to be played.

Beyond the synthetic layer is the "impasse" layer. "The impasse is marked by a phobic attitude -- avoidance. We are phobic, we avoid suffering, especially the suffering

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<sup>43</sup>Perls, Gestalt Therapy Verbatim, p. 59.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.



of frustration."<sup>45</sup> It is possible to connect this phobic layer with the interruptive neurosis, projection. More will be said of this layer later in this analysis.

The layer beyond the impasse is double-fold. Perls calls it the "implosive" layer or the death layer. It is the layer in which the person recoils in fear of the energies of contact, imploding the self. This layer is parallel to the interruptive of retroflection. The other side of the implosive layer is explosion. Perls reports this pole of the implosive layer beautifully in the following:

Once we really get in contact with this deadness of the implosive layer, then something very interesting happens.

The implosion becomes explosion. The death layer comes to life, and this explosion is the link-up with the authentic person who is capable of experiencing and expressing his emotions.<sup>46</sup>

At this point Perls describes four basic kinds of explosions from the death layer: "grief, orgasm, anger, and joy."<sup>47</sup> In explosion there is contact with the authentic self. In explosion the neurosis is no more. Often this gives way to the experience of satori. Satori is an experience of contact with the process, the succession of uninterrupted figure/ground formations. The very thing feared -- nothing-

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

ness, death of the hyperconsciousness of neurosis -- turns out to be blissful peace.<sup>48</sup>

The concept of the impasse presents significant insight into both theory and therapeutic possibilities. It is the layer of stuckness. In the other layers there is at least some sort of horizontal motion. In the impasse one comes to the edge of the cliff. It is the place of the fear of moving on into an unknown realm, yet the realization of the sterility of the previous layers. It is the decision point. The alternative avoidance to the pain of the impasse is projection. That is the 'out' for not accepting responsibility for one's own stuckness. The impasse layer confronts one with the dizzy fact of freedom -- the possibility of going beyond, despite the fear.

Much of the effort of the therapist in gestalt work is to enable the client to find his or her way to the impasse. It is a function not unlike that of the evangelist. The difference in stereotypes is that the therapist then trusts the gestalt process while the evangelist pushes or cajoles. The therapist's work is performed as a coaching toward contact with both one's power and one's dividedness.

Some analysis of the means of recovery of healthy functioning has been suggested in sections on the gestalt

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 61.

process, functioning and malfunctioning. A brief overview will aid in understanding responsibility and freedom.

Therapy understood as educating the "patient" himself or herself in the therapeutic process means that several distinct and crucial elements of gestalt therapy are considered the patient's work. First is actively attempting to contact awareness of what is occurring in the therapeutic event. Second is the willingness to play creatively and freely with and within the suggested exercises of the therapist. Thirdly, as a figure emerges to "own" it as his or her own, one is to report resistances to pursuing contact and follow in the exercise as coached by the therapist (or as intuitively self-led) toward the heightened clarity of the emerging gestalt.

The therapist's skill and work involves coaching the patient in his or her work. The therapist chooses to stage the therapeutic event by suggesting a dialogue, imaging, sense-awareness, or other exercise. Another therapists' task is to direct the flow of the exercise by feeding back observations, and by suggesting new elements in the creative activity which moves toward heightening of contact with the "unaware" or split elements of the person. The therapist's skill is important not only in observing and intuitively leading, but also in trusting the patient's self creating process so as not to intervene unnecessarily in the patient's work.

The point is for the patient to feel the behavior in its very emergency use and at the same time to feel that he is safe because he can cope with the situation. This is to heighten the chronic low-grade emergency to a safe high-grade emergency, attended by anxiety yet controllable by the active patient. The technical problems are (a) to increase the tension by the right leads, and (b) to keep the situation controllable yet not controlled: felt as safe because the patient is at a stage adequate to invent the required adjustment, and not deliberately ward it off.<sup>49</sup>

Two key elements in this therapeutic process or the process of recovery of heightened figure/ground formation are awareness and creative activity. Awareness is the discovery element. It is contact and more. It is also the aspect of "owning" for it is the discovery that one's self is at the contact-boundary. That thirst is me thirsting; that anger, me mobilizing for attack; that perception of beauty, me perceiving beautifully. As such it is claiming responsibility even for what seems to be unconscious. Perls' understanding of awareness is elemental as he indicates in the following:

Now you call awareness 'consciousness' or sensitivity, or just awareness of something. I believe that matter has -- besides extension, duration, etc. -- also awareness. Of course we are not capable yet of measuring the infinitely small quantities of awareness in, let's say, this desk here, but we know that every animal, every plant, has awareness, or you might call it tropism, sensitivity, protoplasmic sensitivity or whatever you want to, but the awareness is there.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Perls, Gestalt Therapy, p. 288.

<sup>50</sup>Perls, Gestalt Therapy Verbatim, p. 64.

Awareness is a crucial element in self-formation, not unthinkably comparable to Berdyaev's integral microcosm. There is yet another element though -- creative activity. Perls states the case and suggests the connection between awareness and creative activity as follows;

that relaxing (of) deliberateness, learning correctly to interpret one's case, and even feeling one's body and one's emotions: these do not, in the end, solve any problems. They make a solution again possible; they transform the unaware secondary physiology again into a problem of creative contact; but then the solution must be lived out.<sup>51</sup>

In a previous statement he reminds us that: "contact must be a creative transformation."<sup>52</sup>

### 5. Responsibility

Gestalt therapy places the burden of responsibility on the individual person. The patient is responsible for his or her work, the neurotic for his or her neurosis, the criminal for his or her own behavior. One is even responsible for the way one perceives an event. That I am not only responsible for my actions, but even for the way something appears to be to me is a radical statement of responsibility.

The radicality of responsibility can be understood as rooted in human awareness. The fact that the gestalt-ists leave little that can not be called to consciousness

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<sup>51</sup>Perls, Gestalt Therapy, p. 407.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 406.

(the possible exception being certain motoric reflex actions) if one works at it, is an indication of the completeness of this principle. It is a matter of choice. One can choose to be aware or avoid awareness. Even in the latter case, one is (albeit dimly) aware of the choice to avoid, and one is responsible for that choice.

This emphasis on personal responsibility is not a re-posing of the idea of 'blame' of an individual or society for behavior in some new way. The placing of responsibility fully on either an individual or society for evil -- even this understanding of responsibility or blame itself -- is a product of split thought. That the person is responsible for his or her actions, feelings, and perceptions means that he or she can change them. They always occur, however, as a response act in the organism/environment field.

A more thorough analysis of responsibility occurs in the next section. Now we are seeing the place of responsibility in the functioning of the gestalt-former (the center) as he or she pushes his or her way to completion in the dialogue between the spiritual self (subjectively feeling the boundary) and the world's thinker in object categories. Perls keeps insisting the person in the dreamwork seminar own their nervousness:

That's it. Look at the difference between the words "I am tensing myself," and "There's a tenseness here." When you say "I feel tenseness,"

you're irresponsible, you are not responsible for this, you are impotent and can't do anything about it. The world should do something--give aspirin or whatever it is. But when you say "I am tensing" you take responsibility, and we can see the first bits of excitement of life coming out.<sup>53</sup>

### C. THE HOW OF THE ESCHATON

#### 1. Responsibility as the Ability to Respond

Perls' key contribution to the examination of freedom is summarized in the definition he gives responsibility --the ability to respond.<sup>54</sup> As mentioned in the previous section, this means the ability to change a situation or one's own position in relationship to it. The example of perceptions of the child untying shoelaces serves well in showing this concept. The child is able to change the behavior and thus is response-able for the act of untying shoes. The child is not, however, able to determine or change the various perceptions, feelings and reactions of the adults. The child is not responsible for their responses. Conversely, the adults are not responsible for the child's action (even though they may prevent it physically). They are, however, response-able for any action they choose to make in the situation, as well as their choices of attitude, feeling, and perception.

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<sup>53</sup>Perls, Gestalt Therapy Verbatim, p. 115.

<sup>54</sup>Perls, Gestalt Therapy, pp. 25 and 216.

Responsibility is directly connected to a person's power of perception and interaction in the organism/environment field. Responsibility is an aspect of recovery or ownership of one's aware functioning at the boundary. It is, as stated in the previous section, the awareness that the experience of thirst is: me thirsting, and I am responsible for that. I am able-to-respond to 'it', with 'it', for 'it'. I am the thirster. Responsibility is awareness and creative activity.

This understanding is a more correct representation of reality as now revealed by scientific analysis than the idea of causality. At least since Einstein, frontiers of science no longer look for "causes", but rather simply seek to discover and describe how events tend to come together. As a result there is a greater mathematization of scientific 'dogma'. No longer are these 'law', but rather 'probabilities' that when certain factors are present in an event, other factors will be also. Hence, the association of responsibility with cause rather than responsibility is a perversion of its true meaning.

Especially with regard to human personality, this discovery or recovery of the obvious meaning of responsibility is revolutionary. It turns the common world and understanding upside-down. To use theological language, it is eschatological for it brings the ordinary to a halt. To use religious language, it is the revelation of grace



within the seeming judgment; it is the incarnation of power into the midst of slavery. Responsibility is the ability to respond.

## 2. Responsibility and Perceptions

The extreme implication for responsibility, as Perls understands it, lies in its ultimacy as a principle within gestalt formation. The very forming of a gestalt is the power, the author-ity the creative nature of the person. And it is at the same time the self-formation of the person as a field reality. Thus the figure/ground formations are the response/ability of the organism/ environment field on the contact-boundary. Ultimately the perception of the person, the form of the person's experience, is the person's own creation (as a field reality in a particular time and space context).

Of course the seeming given-ness of 'objective' reality can be pointed to as evidence that the person or figure/ground former is not independent of the objective world. For a field theory in which environment and organism are in constant mutual interface and interchange, creating 'self' and 'each other', this is no problem. The problem is in stating the case splitly, in dualities. If pressed, the very fact of the possibility of hallucination shows the extent of the creative power, the ability to 'respond', of the person in shaping his or her own percep-

tions.

The implications of personal responsibility for perceptions in the social environment are especially powerful. How I see another person, how I perceive their actions toward me and their expectations of me; these are my responsibility. So that if I perceive another to be an enemy, that is my responsibility; which means both that it is my act of definition and at the same time my source of mobilization for fight or flight. I am response-able. If my perception is in good contact on the boundary (I am functioning healthily) this perception could be crucial for survival. On the other hand, if I am self-deceiving in the perception, there could be tragedy. In either case I am responsible for the perception.

This sort of 'responsibility' does not provide any answers to why I make such a perception. It only tells how. This is significant for the ethical task. Responsibility is not causality. It is creative power. It is not blame or even some dreaded final accountability. It is creativity which, like justice, is blind. In it come both grace and judgment as a whole.

### 3. Responsibility and Field

The potency of responsibility lies in its being a field reality. To speak of individual responsibility as if the individual's functioning were 'out of context',

isolated from any interaction with an environment, is to deaden responsibility. Yet that is the typical use of the concept. In fact there is no such out-of-context event. When recalling that we always refer to an "interacting of organism and environment in any function,"<sup>1</sup> responsible comes to sound dynamic. The center, which is called the person, is not some separate reality. The center exists precisely as an awareness of interaction. When Perls speaks of being centered he is speaking of being keenly aware of the parade of interactions in their emergence, growth to fullness and completion.

The language may suggest that the center is nothing. Recalling Perls' allusion to the Eastern 'nothing',<sup>55</sup> or to Berdyaev's Ungrund, there is rich possibility here. The point is that the language does not mean that the center is powerless. On the contrary, it is powerful because it is act rather than 'thing'. This is because it is the aware and creative shaper of the interactions. The passing parade of interactions are no flukes. They are the emergence of interchanges out of organismic need and environmental stimulation and providence. They are field creations of response. The aware center is response-able precisely because it is a field former and formation. This is also to say that the figure and ground are not separable

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<sup>55</sup>Perls, Gestalt Therapy Verbatim, p. 61.

entities. The aware center, or person, is not to be confused with the organism or the figure. It is a field reality.

#### 4. The Character of Responsibility

It would be appropriate to review the character of responsibility in Perls' work with the same categories as seen in the character of freedom in Berdyaev's. Freedom and responsibility both center in the person and in the core of what is personal. They are both perspectives on human creative ability and its ultimate nature. This is not to say that Perls and Berdyaev fit with each other in a one-to-one correlation. There are many exciting differences in their understanding, as well as their basic approach. The point is that here at a signal aspect about human nature they have reached some beautifully similar and mutually stimulating conclusions.

Responsibility in its essence has to do with the person's capacity. This capacity or creative energy is self-generating; it is the power of the very creation of the person as a self. There is no life in the organism/environment field without the successive emergence of interactions on the contact-boundary which sustain the organism as an actor in the field. When the organism is dead it is part of the landscape (or environment) in other organism/environment fields. Response-ability is the life power or

capacity of the person.

Hence responsibility has an ultimate quality. It is the difference between life and death. It is what it means to be a person rather than an object (part of the landscape). This responsibility also has an irrational aspect. Responsibility encompasses and transcends the rational or thought. Evidence of its irrationality is simple enough to give for it is seen in neurosis and emergency functions such as shock. They are a part of the person's ability-to-respond, as is reasoning.

Responsibility, then, is a stark fact for a person. In its ultimacy it is unavoidable. Yet much of common life experience as witnessed by history and human social expressions is precisely an attempted avoidance. Avoidance is also a response-ability; this is the tragic or ironic element and also a testimony to the ultimacy of power in responsibility. The effect is that, in persons, responsibility is both an unavoidable fact and at the same time a matter of choice. How the response will take shape or how to use the ability to respond is a matter of choice. The choosing itself is unavoidable fact.

Despite the possibility for self-deceptive avoidance, responsibility is a fact because it is a function or description of the creative process of the organism/environment field. Therefore in its purity or essence it is a function of activity toward beauty and integrality.

Admittedly, these are more Berdyaev's categories than they are Perls'. The gestalt is still a whole and the aim of the gestalting process is completion. The ecstasy of completion, the experience of satori upon creating a resolution, the sense of solidity which accompanies the heightened awareness of good contact, these might well be descriptions of personal beauty.

## CHAPTER III

A RESTATEMENT OF THE CHARACTER OF HUMAN FREEDOM  
IN LIGHT OF BERDYAEV AND PERLS

The aim of this chapter is to provide a general synthesis of these contributions to the understanding of human freedom. The approach in this synthesis includes: an examination of how the dynamics of Berdyaev's thought generally fit with Perls' discoveries; a more specific treatment of the relationship of freedom and responsibility; and sketches of freedom and human values, and of freedom and religious formulations.

## A. BERDYAEVIAN FREEDOM IN PERLSIAN PSYCHOLOGY

What we may for the time being call existential philosophy marks a transition from the interpretation of knowledge as objectification, to understanding it as participation, union with the subject matter and entering into cooperation with it.<sup>1</sup>

1. Freedom and Contact

The point of participation -- participation which leads to understanding rather than objectification -- is that it is a description of field activity. Contact might be

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<sup>1</sup>Nicolai A. Berdyaev, The Beginning and the End (New York: Harper & Row, 1952), p. 61.

said to be the self point, or self location, in the organism/environment field. It is the 'place' of the initiation of the creative activity which Berdyaev calls participation in his reference to knowledge. Contact is necessary for creative activity; it is its genesis as contact is also the prerequisite for awareness in the self. Contact provides the 'stuff' for the creative act.

In contact is also found the possibility for transcending the subjective-objective split. This transcending includes the awareness of the I and the non-I, but moves beyond the presumption of objectivization to an I-Thou meeting. It is the awareness of I and Thou as mutually related figure and ground. I is not necessarily to be identified as figure, nor Thou as background. That moves toward a split. Figure and ground are a whole. Properly speaking they are figure-ground; one cannot be extrapolated from the other. Freedom from the slavery of the splits (the creation of false worlds) is a reclaiming the reality of the figure-ground. The nature of creative capacity includes the ability to create illusory fragmentations. But the origin of human capacity is in the creation of figure-ground wholes or gestalts. Responsibility or freedom is originally a field function. The activity of a self or person in the organism/environment field means contact.



The positing of freedom as a cosmic principle in Berdyaev's thought with its accompanying qualities of ultimacy and irrationality has the most impact on human freedom when correlated with contact and awareness. If human freedom is an aspect of cosmic or divine freedom, it means that human freedom is an image of the fundamental creative process of the universe. Contact of the human personal figure with the universal ground, or awareness of the universal ground, is the dynamic ingredient in human ability. It is in contact or awareness that any ability (or freedom as power) becomes a reality. In contact, then, the possibility is presented for the concretization or actualization of what is otherwise pure, abstract potentiality (Ungrund or cosmic freedom). The Persian concept of contact-awareness correlates richly with the Berdyaevian idea of the person as microcosm--the universe in a particular, unique form.

The universal is not the common; it is not abstract, but concrete i.e., it is plenitude. The universal is all the less common in that it is not independent being, it is to be found in single beings, in rebus, according to the old terminology.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Nicolai A. Berdyaev, Slavery and Freedom (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944), p. 38.

By implication, freedom in contact (or the full response-ability of contact) is a matter of the quality of contact. This quality, which has been referred to as healthy contact, results in clearer perceptions and expanded possibilities for the gestalt--sharper form of and potential for beauty in the figure/ground configuration. Avoidance of contact manifests as the slavery of confusion, fuzziness, fixation on past options or solutions, or introjection.

## 2. Freedom and Digestion

In this rubric, digestion is limited specifically to the destructuring/construction aspects of the gestalt formation process, rather than using the more general analogy of eating and digestion with the whole process. In this category of Perls, the aspect of freedom which is most fully revealed is creativity itself. Creativity is the work of making actual the new form which emerged as a possibility in contact or awareness. If Perls suggests that two ingredients are necessary for full functioning--awareness and creativity--then awareness is of heightened value in contact, and creativity in digestion. If the microcosmic aspect of personality is correlative to awareness, then the creator aspect is correlative to digestion.

Destruction is a crucial element of creativity, despite human desire to soften its tone. The capacity of

freedom (the ability of response) is a power; of breaking down, selecting, choosing, rejecting; which acts as hot fire in the shaping of malleable ground and figure into the form of the figure-ground. This applies not only to the obvious examples of creation which have manifestations in the cultural or time-bound world, but also to the self-creations of the person (one's perceptions, feelings, behavior, etc.). Both Berdyaev and Perls give testimony to the cruciality of destructuring in the digestion process. The following two statements are evidence of their parallel thought as well as inciteful for religious symbolization:

Berdyaev: "One must die in order to come to life again."<sup>3</sup>

Perls: "To suffer one's death and be reborn is not easy."<sup>4</sup>

The point of destructuring is that it is integral to the process of creation.

Digestion as an activity of the psyche (the human person) reveals mankind the creator. Here fit Berdyaev's notions of the image of God and, indeed, the essence of his christology. The God/man is the revelation

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<sup>3</sup>Nicolai A. Berdyaev, The Divine and the Human, (London, Bles, 1949), p. 186.

<sup>4</sup>Frederick S. Perls, Gestalt Therapy Verbatim, (New York: Bantam, 1969), back cover.

of the divine in the human and the human in the divine. The coming of Christianity is the coming of full realization of human creativity. Our co-creativity with God in the universe is revealed, complete with its restorative and regenerative aspects. In the following, Berdyaev shows the digestive quality of freedom in persons as creators and suggests some of its results.

Liberation never provides a simple escape from reality or the rejection of reality. Spiritual liberation is conflict. Spirit is not an abstract idea, it does not belong to the category of universals. Not only every man, but a dog, a cat, or an insect is of greater existential value, than an abstract idea, or than a common universal.

Spiritual liberation is accompanied by transition not to the abstract but to the concrete. The Gospel is evidence of this. In that lies the personalism of the Gospel. Spiritual liberation is victory over the power of what is foreign. In this is the meaning of love.<sup>5</sup>

Freedom in digestion is the working of creative energy. The emphasis here is on the responding (the response-ability of digestion). The heightening of freedom here (or the synthesizing response) is an act of creativity in conflict and novelty, and it is accompanied by the sense of self as actor. This is the meaning of the creative act as an act of courage. The result is the

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<sup>5</sup>Berdyaev, Slavery and Freedom, p. 248.

particular form of the figure/ground--the unique gestalt. The avoidance of digestion's proper response can be felt as impasse or implosion and the resulting slavery of introjection (maintained), projection, or retroflection.

### 3. Freedom and Completion

In the gestalt process completion is not the end in the sense of time, but rather the fulfillment in the sense of wholeness. As such it is the achieving of the center or of integrality. When the gestalt is achieved, when there is closure, there is a completed whole of human experience. When there is no completion, there is "unfinished business,"<sup>6</sup> a fragmentation of the human person which takes energy to keep unfinished. The freedom of completion is the freedom of integrality, the self-hood of the centered person. Perls acknowledges this in saying: "This achieving the center, being grounded in one's self, is about the highest state a human being can achieve."<sup>7</sup>

The opposite of integrality is the fragmented or neurotic person. Berdyaev speaks of this condition as suffering as in the following statement:

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<sup>6</sup> Frederick S. Perls, In and Out of the Garbage Pail (New York: Bantam, 1969), p. 65.

<sup>7</sup> Perls, Gestalt Therapy Verbatim, p. 40.

The dualism in which man lives in this world is also a source of incalculable suffering. The experience of suffering is the antithesis of the experience of integrality. The violation of the integrality and harmony of the world also gives rise to suffering. But this happens because man meets with a world of objects and only rarely breaks through to the world of subsistences. Within me myself there is much which is alien to me, which is not mine (the 'Es' of Freud) and this element in my very self which is alien to me is a source of suffering. The struggle for the realization of personality is a struggle against the alien in me, which makes a slave of me.<sup>8</sup>

Of course the preceeding catagories of synthesis can be misunderstood to be parts of a whole. In truth there are no parts without the whole. The gestalt is either complete or unfinished, it is never partly finished. The divisions are only for the sake of clarity in grasping the dynamic of the process. The various aspects are interdependent and strengthen each other as they move toward fullness.

The highest levels of a conscious sense of freedom (felt often as liberation) occur only in the completion of the gestalt. In completion responsibility is felt as fact, in the owning of one's responses. (I am the thirster, the drinker, the feeler of satisfaction.) There is heightened awareness of the process as participation in the wider ground, the whole field. This awareness emerges in the

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<sup>8</sup> Berdyaev, The Divine and the Human, p. 70.

equilibrium of completion. This is contrasted to the fragmented sense of individual over-against the world, somehow 'wresting' a living. In its heights the peace of completion transcends the field awareness of the I-Thou in contact or even the ecstasy of the creator in the midst of the creative act. For the person, the sense of freedom is actualized in integrality.

Freedom in completion might be said to mean wholeness; it is responsibility as ownership of integrality. In free completion is known the height of the religious sentiment--peace. It is beauty as personal experience. Whether the gestalt issues out in the form of ecstasy, grief, anger, or orgasm, the closure of each is rest. The avoidance of completion, despite some level of contact and creation, is the tragedy of non-rest. It is manifested in fixation on the engaged self; this is egotism. The irony of egotism is that the person does not allow enjoyment of the fruits of itself as a field reality by return to the ground.

#### 4. Freedom, Responsibility and Time

To know the meaning of freedom and responsibility it is crucial to understand their relationship to time. Time is ordinarily thought of as duration divisible into measureable, sequential units. It is difficult to consider an atom of time, as indivisible, as outside the notion of sequence. Freedom or response-ability can only be known

as internal-to-gestalt or atom-of-time realities, except in an extremely relative, watered-down sense.

The relationship of freedom to historical time (time as ordinarily considered) is tragic. There is only the dim remnant of freedom in historical existence. Enslavement is the tendency of time. Berdyaev allows that this is especially the case in which mankind makes use of time in the modern world.

Another result of the power of technics, for which man is insufficiently adapted, and which causes him great difficulty, is the terrible shortening of time, a speed with which man cannot keep pace. No single moment is of value in itself -- it is only a means for the next. Incredible activity is demanded of man, giving him no time to recover his balance. But these active minutes make man passive. He becomes a means outside the human process; he is only a function of the process of production.<sup>9</sup>

Perls' explanation of this fact is that the true human ability-to-respond resides in the here and now. The presently emerging gestalt is the one in which there are choices and options. (Recall his statement as quoted on page 59.

Still, this is not to say that there is no hope in history. The possibility of change and newness in historical time, and the dim reflection of freedom in historical existence, are breakthroughs from the internal life in

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<sup>9</sup>Nicolai A. Berdyaev, The Realm of Spirit and the Realm of Caesar (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1952), p. 51.



atoms of time. The new creation of a single gestalt becomes a shift in the flow of historic existence or the entrance of some new element in the world. This is an expression of the eschatological quality of freedom. In the creative act there is a breakdown in the way things were, and the inbreaking of a new order.

When freedom is understood in this way, as creative act or able response, past, present and future are brought together. This is not only true in the eschatological sense; it is also a transcending of brokenness of past and future by redeeming them in the present. In memory, for example, the past is not simply revived in its previous condition; it is recreated in the present in a new form.

The relation of freedom to time is an explanation for freedom's illusive and mysterious power. It is not unlike the scandalous 'power' revealed in a crucified Christ and has the same dynamic as love. Freedom's seeming limit or abstractness is a function of the perspective one has on it from a time-bound world. Freedom is a spiritual reality; that is, internal to personal experience. It is a gestalt reality, internal to atoms of time (as Berdyaev says, atoms of eternity<sup>10</sup>). The time-bound world sees the

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<sup>10</sup>Nicolai A. Berdyaev, Spirit and Reality (London: Bles, 1939), p. 174.

plodding gross motion. The limit of freedom is the limit of response-ability or personal power (not to be confused with individual-social force). In the here and now one has all manner of freedom to choose how to respond; outside the here and now one may seem enslaved to 'outside' forces.

## B. THE CONNECTION OF FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY

The depth of the ego in man is connected with spirituality; spirit is the principle which synthesizes, and maintains the unity of personality. Man must all the while perform a creative act in relation to himself. In this creative act the self-realization of personality comes to pass. It is a constant struggle against the multiplicity of false egos in man. Chaos stirs within man; he is connected with the chaos which is hidden behind the cosmos. Out of this chaos are born illusory, false egos. Every passion by which a man is possessed can create an ego which is not the real ego, which is Es. In the struggle for personality, for the real, this deep ego, there takes place a process of dissolution--this is a danger which eternally lies in wait--and a process of synthesis, of integration. Man is in greater need of psycho-synthesis, than of psychoanalysis, which in itself may lead to the disintegration and collapse of personality. <sup>11</sup>

### 1. The Age-Old Balancing Act

It would seem inevitable that a discussion of freedom would turn to a discussion of responsibility. The usual role of the two ideas is some sort of balancing as one against the other, to inform, to modify, even to

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<sup>11</sup>Berdyayev, The Divine and the Human, p. 134.

nullify. Often this is done in a way that is an injustice to both ideas.

It is possible to see this dissertation in terms of a simple exercise in dialectic. More hopefully it carries some of the same type of fruitfulness as Tillich's correlations. There, at least, polarities reveal not only their tension, but also their union, and their mutuality. If there is anything unique to this particular set of perceptions in regard to human freedom and responsibility, it is in the basis and authority of their essential correlation.

In the preceeding synthesis an attempt was made to use both the term freedom and the term responsibility in describing the sense of human freedom within the categories of Perls' gestalt process. Furthermore, human freedom's microcosmic (contact and awareness), creative (destructing/constructing) and integral (completion) aspects were all considered. The idea's relationship to time was treated to show the manner of its concreteness. The full potency of this correlation of freedom and responsibility can only be known in their mutual roots in the basic personal process, the synthesizing creative act. Coupled with the richness of parallels in many other aspects of two such diverse perspectives as those of Perls and Berdyaev, the balancing of human freedom need not seem so obtruse or unreliable as to warrant so little treatment in theology, as Tillich has suggested. Nor should freedom and responsibility be

treated as somehow opposing each other.

## 2. The Realm of Potential and the Realm of Actual

Creative ability is a link between these two philosophic categories, the potential and the actual. This is the case in gestalt theory as well as philosophical theology. Creative activity participates in both potential and actual. Therefore freedom and responsibility involve both. Freedom and responsibility stand as the point of contact between potential and actual.

This can be seen and understood in the framework of time. Both past and future are essentially potential. The past provides material for creation. Although the past seems to be actual, it was only actual when it was present. In this present the past provides some of the media of potential. The future is more completely potential. The only sense of its being actual is in the imagination of the present. The present is actual. Freedom and responsibility are here and now realities, as has been noted. They are present in the actual, the person's concrete self. They are also fully realities of the realm of potential. Freedom (as Berdyaev defines it metaphysically) and responsibility (as Perls defines it psychodynamically) are the very meaning of potentiality; they are the true possibilities. This is the same sense in which they bring together past, present, and future. They bring together the

realm of potential and the realm of actual in themselves.

In freedom/responsibility is the ground of the ideas of power and authority. This is also a dimension of the connection of potential and actual. It is in the union of freedom and responsibility as one fact that this is so. To falsely break up the synthesis leads to the contradictions of ordinary, logical use. The common use of freedom presses it to mean only pure potential. When this is translated to the realm of actual it becomes a perversion of power which is, ironically force. The common use of responsibility presses it to mean only the actual. One is responsible only for that over which one has extreme or full "authority". When translated to the realm of potential this becomes a perversion such as the fantasy, guilt.<sup>12</sup> These are aberrations of freedom and responsibility. True power is not force, for it has the openness of options. True authority is not a fantasy, as it suggests author creator-ship.

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<sup>12</sup>Perls identifies guilt as resentment (which is being self-repressed). In so doing he identifies guilt with a more concretizable emotion--anger. He further shows that the guilt-resentment is a type of indigestion (to use his consumption analogy); Frederick S. Perls, Gestalt Therapy (New York: Dell, 1951), p. 344. It is an element which is being clung to undigested rather than either chewed up (destroyed) and its valuable part assimilated, or spit out. Guilt-resentment is thus something unfinished in a relationship which a person keeps unfinished by choice. It is with this in mind that I speak of it as a fantasy. This understanding of guilt in no way contradicts the religious idea which has long been understood as an unfinishedness or brokenness in relationship.

### 3. Freedom as Fact

That freedom is a fact of human existence, a hard fact or element integral to human life, is one of the more startling and profound revelations of Perls and Berdyaev about freedom. It is this fact which can lead to the works-righteousness--grace split and other problems in theological thinking. A demonstration of the connection of freedom, its givenness in human life, and responsibility occurs in Berdyaev's handling of Dostoevsky's notion of crime.

What is the destiny of the man who has gone beyond the limits of what is allowable? What regeneration of his being may it involve? Dostoevsky shows the ontological consequences of crime. After freedom has led through self-will to wrongdoing, punishment follows by an inner fatality, punishment which tracks man in the deepest parts of his nature. That is why Dostoevsky refused all his life to look at evil from a merely exterior point of view. ...our secret thoughts, which sometimes hardly reach our consciousness, make us murderers in spirit, and we are responsible for them.<sup>13</sup>

Perls might remind us that this is saying no more than that we created them (these secret thoughts). This is also a revelation of the fact of human power or freedom. It is no wonder that Berdyaev often speaks of freedom as a burden or duty. Perls is simply identifying that response (and hence response-ability) is a description of what

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<sup>13</sup> Nicolai A. Berdyaev, Dostoevsky (New York: Meridian, 1934), p. 90.

occurs in gestalt formation, which is the atomistic process of a living organism. To identify freedom as a fact is to identify its unity with responsibility.

The beauty of this disclosure of Berdyaev and Perls is its claim that persons are, in fact, free. This could even be considered the gospel of Berdyaev and Perls. Freedom is a fact, like an unexpected gift; it need only be claimed. From this perspective human freedom is the other side of the coin of the reality principle. The tragedy of neurosis points to the tendency toward freedom avoidance, even denial, and the costly expenditure of energy involved in this self-deceit. Evil and slavery enter through this "flaw" in human nature. Freedom is nonetheless a fact which is to be claimed.

### C. FREEDOM AND HUMAN VALUES

#### 1. The Position of the Person

The person is the central focus for both Berdyaev and Perls. There is no doubt that in terms of ethical values the person holds the highest possible position in both perspectives. The nature of the person also defines the way in which other ethical valuations are made. Although Berdyaev has a cosmic scheme, the effect of the scheme is to enlighten the dynamics of his 'personalism.' Perls stays mostly with concrete situations involving

persons. Still his occasional comments such as that on awareness in all matter, suggest that the way he perceives the universe is a function of the way he understands the processes of the human person.

By contrast both Perls and Berdyaev place society under the judgement of the personal. Perls is in no way behaviorally deterministic. Yet he suggests the difficulty and power of societal influence on the person's organismic self-regulation as has been shown.<sup>14</sup> The implication of these statements is clearly that the person's value is assumed as basic. Berdyaev is no less critical of society as it stands in relation to the person.

Of all the forms of slavery to which man is liable the greatest importance attaches to the slavery of man to society. Man has been a socialized creature all through the long millenia of civilized life. And the sociological doctrine of man would persuade us that it is precisely that socialization which has created man. Man lives, as it were, in a social hypnosis. And it is difficult for him to set his freedom in opposition to the despotic claims of society, because the social hypnosis, through the lips of sociologists of various schools of thought, convinces him that he has received his very freedom from society and from society alone.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Frederick S. Perls, Ego, Hunger and Aggression (New York: Random House, 1947), p. 62. (Reference 22, p. 60)

<sup>15</sup>Berdyaev, Slavery and Freedom, p. 102.



The role of consciousness is of crucial importance in understanding human value and values, and the human situation in society as well. Perls has most fully explained human consciousness and understands it broadly in terms of awareness. This understanding allows for much to be claimable to human consciousness that has been damned to the unconscious in more traditional, Freudian psychology. The effect of Perls' insight is a much more powerful, responsible person. Perls' consciousness leaves ample room for Berdyaev's super-consciousness or consciousness which transcends the dualism of subject and object.

Still, it is the role of consciousness to create the difficulty in the first place. More often it is in the specific function of conscious thought that splits occur. Perls' suggestion that most ordinary thinking is rehearsing is a valuable contribution, as it shows the introduction of an alien element of time in the here and now gestalt. The splits which occur in thought, whether in distorting awareness of time or objectivization, lead to the distortions in human valuations and perceptions. These are still the person's creation and responsibility. When multiplied in the social environment they can have the effect of becoming an 'objective' force with some weight.

The role of freedom in the person's position can be defined in two aspects. First it is the quality of freedom (and the kindred ideas of response ability and creativity)

which defines personality as the basic knowing-perceiving entity in the universe. This gives human persons their place at the center of any values scheme. Secondly, it is out of the freedom of consciousness that evil (brokenness) enters human life. By means of the same capacity, the break may be transcended.

## 2. Integral Beauty

Perhaps next to the value of the person, the idea of integral beauty stands as a criterion in the scheme of human values based on freedom. Because this term is Berdyaev's language its importance in his thought may seem clearer than in that of Perls. We have seen the significance for Berdyaev of a "gracious transfiguring creative energy"<sup>16</sup> for example. However, the idea is no less significant for Perls, as seen his statement on centeredness.<sup>17</sup> (Reference 25, p. 61.)

The concept, as it is being defined here, has to do above all with the self-creation of the person. It is the sense of centeredness in the organism/environment field which comes in healthy contact and functioning. It is the

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<sup>16</sup>Berdyaev, The Divine and the Human, P. 191.

<sup>17</sup>Perls, Gestalt Therapy Verbatim, p. 32.

full, completed gestalt which is integrally beautiful. For Berdyaev it is the transfiguring creative energy of the higher consciousness, the work of the microcosmic person, which brings integrality and beauty. In this creative work is built up the personality.

Perceptions, the person's image of the figure/ground formation, are the inception point of integral beauty in the person's gestalt process. It is the character of the perception that is either an enslavement or a transfiguration. This is a psychological insight which only Perlsian gestalt theory could lend to Berdyaev's intuitions. In a perception of integral beauty the inherent freedom of the person not only creates itself as the person, but also moves 'out' with transforming power 'into the world.'

Integral beauty as a value is also manifested in human creation in society and culture. More will be said of this in the remainder of the section on values. The place of the person and of integral beauty in valuation makes any attempt at establishing a firm hierarchy of values impossible. Berdyaev expresses this in his reference to Jesus' statement about truth.

And man is confronted not by abstract truth but by The Truth, as the way and the life. "I am the Truth, the Way and the Life." This means that truth is a concrete personality; it is its way and its life. Truth is in the highest degree dynamic.

It is not given in a finished and a congealed form. Truth is not dogmatic. It is given only in the creative act.<sup>18</sup>

This Truth is given in the gestalt emerging in the organism/environment field; it is a perception of integral beauty. This is how there can even be an aspect of beauty in pain, when it is a holistic experience.

### 3. Creativity and Beauty in the World

It was suggested that much of Berdyaev's language is deceptive concerning his attitude toward nature.<sup>19</sup> Perls' language would suggest that nature has a high value, given the importance of the environment. However, the two are not so far apart considering that Perls is describing a process in speaking of environment, and Berdyaev is usually referring to the time-bound condition of the world when speaking of nature. For both, the person's relationship to the world is highly important.

The immediate environment of the person is the body. That is, it is the point of initial contact of the person with the world. Contact awareness may happen seemingly entirely 'inside' as well as entirely 'outside' the

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<sup>18</sup> Berdyaev, Slavery and Freedom, p. 81.

<sup>19</sup> Chapter 1, page 21 & 22.

body. This only demonstrates that the environment includes, but is not contained in, the body. The body itself is in constant interaction with the wider environment. Of course environment can only be considered in isolation from the organism as an abstraction. The person is also a field reality and as such is dependent upon, but not limited by, the immediate environment -- the body. The point of the discussion is to refresh and concretize the understanding of the intimate relationship between the person (as a spiritual or gestalt reality) and the world. The body is the starting point for personal activity in the world. It is the place from which we see the person's response -- ability in and for the world. The relationship can be one of either intimately experiencing or of objectively considering.

Perls and Berdyaev, each from his different perspective, would have it that creativity is the first order value in defining human relationship with the world. In gestalt theory it is expressed in terms of healthy perception-formation, orientation, and manipulation. This is the creative work of the person. Berdyaev uses terms such as integral beauty or transfiguration. For each, creativity includes creation as it is more commonly considered, that of the artist or artisan. The effects of creative activity can persist in time and culture and be a source of new beauty and inspiration. In his last writings Perls turns more and more to poetry. Berdyaev considered the writing of philos-

ophy a high art.

For both men creation in the social environment is important. In Perls' work this usually is implied in his criticisms of society or by his emphasis on the value of the person's functioning to change the environment when appropriate. Berdyaev, as one would expect, is much more abstract in his approach. Creativity is a duty in the same sense that freedom is responsibility. In his theology, humankind is called to be in a co-creative work with God. Thus one's freedom in the world (or responsibility in the world) is the creative act which brings beauty. The creative act is eschatological; it brings about a new heaven and earth. Translating, the gestalt is an eschatological reality, a new creation. Berdyaev expresses this eschatological role of the free person in the world.

But my faith in victory is eschatological and my religion is prophetic. What is needed is not so much to set certain ends before one and to realize them in the practical world, making use of evil means in doing so, so as to display, express and radiate a creative energy of one's own, in knowledge, in love, in a sense of community, in freedom and in beauty, and to be self-determined in the strength of one's awareness of the end.<sup>20</sup>

#### 4. Evil in Creativity and Creation

Evil as well as beauty enters the world through human creative activity. This seeming incongruity is an

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<sup>20</sup>Berdyaev, The Beginning and the End, p. 253.

aspect of the fact that malfunction is a kind of functioning. The gestalting process goes on even when the gestalts are incomplete and poor in quality. Avoidance and objectivization are creative acts, the result of human freedom. This is a statement of the human condition or situation as it is traditionally known. It is a description of the "fallen nature" of humankind, the fact of tragedy in human experience.

The dynamics of human tragedy have been shown in both Perls' psychology and Berdyaev's philosophy. It originates in consciousness as a type of deceit -- the creation of false worlds and denial of contact-awareness and interaction with the real one. Another way to state this tragedy is to speak of the creation of splits in the figure/grounds, which Berdyaev calls objectivization. A further manifestation is in the ossification of the creative act in time. These three aspects are interrelated. Time seems to ossify a creation precisely when consciousness replaces the primary world of new creation with the secondary world of being (past creations).

The problem of evil is seen in both creativity and in creation. Evil enters creativity; that is, the creative act or the emerging gestalt; as mal-functioning, a breaking apart of integrality. Evil manifests in creation when one fails to take a newly creative attitude toward it no matter how beautiful the creation in its origin. One example of

this is in the desire of one person to be like another. It is as if one would be the other rather than oneself. This is a common tragedy. It finds expression in society as when adults implore youth to be like certain heroes. It finds expression in individuals as in the occasional pang of jealousy.

If evil enters in creativity, a distinctively personal activity, then it is by the same activity that the split is healed and evil transcended. Perls' concept and use of responsibility in therapy is a key to this fact. When a person claims responsibility for the feeling tones of his or her awareness, his or her perceptions, actions, thoughts, and the very creation of the splits which seem to enslave; then the power is claimed to recreate them. The claiming of responsibility is the claiming of freedom. As noted in the discussion on creativity and beauty, for Berdyaev this is the beginning of the transfiguration of the world.

The illusions of consciousness upon which the so-called 'objective world' rests can be conquered. The creative power of man as it changes the structure of consciousness, can be not only a consolidation of this world, not only a culture, but also a liberation of the world, and the end of history, that is to say, the establishment of the Kingdom of God, not as a symbolic but as a real kingdom. The Kingdom of God denotes not only redemption from sin and a return to original purity, but the creation of a new world. Every authentic creative act of man enters into it, every real act of liberation.



It is not only the other world it is this world  
transfigured.<sup>21</sup>

#### D. FREEDOM AND RELIGIOUS FORMULATIONS

The avoidance of theological terminology to this point would have been ridiculous in a holistic effort such as this. Still, this section will attempt to sketch some of the impact of the idea of freedom, in light of both Perls and Berdyaev, on some theological categories. It is acknowledged that this can only provide an overview of possibilities for further integration, just as did the previous section for an ethic of personal creativity.

##### 1. Responsibility, Freedom, and God

Linguistic analysis is a complete study in and of itself. Without attempting to even touch upon the scope of relating experience to language or the problem of the presentation of reality, some brush strokes can be painted as to the insights of Perls and Berdyaev into the nature of ultimates. One recurring usage is itself revealing, that of the hyphenated designation. There is the God/Man, the divine-human, the figure/ground and organism/environment, to name the obvious. In addition are many implied connectional portrayals such as God/Godhead and response/ability.

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<sup>21</sup>Berdyaev, Slavery and Freedom, p. 266.

The tendency to name unities or ultimate categories by their polar aspects seems to suggest something of the nature and dynamic of human perception of, and relation to, Truth. Truth is only reached when the fractured dualism is mended, yet only known in recognizing the differing end points. Likewise there is a need for integrating the abstract and concrete, and the potential and actual. Berdyaev's insight that God as a person makes sense only against the ground of divine free principle, or Non-Being, is of the same order as Perls' field theory. There is no figure without ground, no environment without organism. The polarities are not opposites, but rather conjoint realities comprising a field. The ultimate concrete personality, God, finds an opposite not in freedom, for freedom is integral to the definition of God. Impersonal objectivization is closer to the opposite of God than the nonpersonal creative principle, freedom. The possibilities for this integral approach to understanding are limitless and rich. A more extensive Christology of the God/man is but one area for fruitful thought.

The concepts of spirit and gestalt are the seat of both human nature and God for both men (although Perls is unlikely to own the term God). The meaning of the terms is strikingly similar. Spirit means the actualization of freedom or creation out of no-thing. Another term for spirit is person (although personality also implies self-identity).

Spirit is the naming of the primal reality. God as a person is spirit, purely creator; human persons, being creators and also subject to the perversion of time-bound creation, have spirit. Gestalt is the name of the process of creation of forms out of the givens of a universe, or one might say out of the interaction of an intimate relationship (organism/environment field at the contact boundary). Just as God is spirit, Perls implies that he believes the gestalt process is the ultimate creative reality of the universe. The principle constituting spirit is freedom and the principle constituting gestalt is responsibility.

With these suggestions concerning freedom/responsibility and God, the following extended quotation from Berdyaev is given as an additional pointer towards a religion of freedom and its mysterious, co-creative relationship with God.

Certain traits of this eternal religion, which is new only in external appearance, of this Christian and Trinitarian religion, this religion freed from slavery to the world of objects, can be guessed. In the religion of the Spirit, the religion of freedom, everything will appear in a new light. There will be no authority and no retribution; the nightmare of a legalistic conception of Christianity and of an everlasting hell, will finally disappear. It will have as its basis not judgment at a tribunal and retribution, but creative development and transfiguration, assimilation to God. A new anthropology will be revealed and the religious meaning of human creativeness will be recognized. It will be understood that freedom is its primary basis. The idea of God will be purified from servile sociomorphism. The idea of God as sufficient unto Himself and as a potentate who wields power, still includes relics of an idolatry which is not yet overcome. It is

only the conception of God as suffering, and yearning for the Other, and as sacrificed, which subdues atheism and the fight against God. There is a paradox in the knowledge of God which must be courageously faced and put into words, thus; the affirmation of God by my whole being means that God exists; human freedom creates God, and this means that God is; my creating of God is a divine-human act of creation.<sup>22</sup>

## 2. Freedom of Christ in Form and Experience

A Christology of the God/man needs to develop along two lines, form and experience. The form includes the further development of the meaning of co-functioning hyphenated reality. The God/man reveals both the divine in the human and the human in the divine. The God/man is the realization of divine ultimate spirituality in human time-bound experience. The Christ also transcends the splits of subject-object, organism-environment, etc., within human existence. The Christ is personal. The form of Christ can be "in me," likewise the wholeness that is the form of Christ. In fact the Christ is most deeply a part of me; a part with which I play hide and seek.

The role of consciousness in understanding the Christ is important in both form and experience. It is consciousness which is the seat of transfiguration that is Christ's. The transfiguration of the brokenness of human experience is precisely the nature or form of the Christ --

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<sup>22</sup>Berdyayev, The Divine and the Human, p. 185.

the God/man. Within a human person's consciousness is the possibility of the experience of the Christ. It is this transfiguration in human consciousness that is one's experience of the God/man. It is variously named the experience of Christ "in me," the Christic consciousness, born again, or satori.

The claim that Jesus was the Christ in history is a two-fold affirmation from this perspective. First it is an affirmation of the manifestation of the Christ and the reality of the God/man for humankind. This is an affirmation that freedom is a fact, and a fact realizable by every person. Secondly it is a statement about history and the human situation. I can experience Christ in no less sure ways than did the human person Jesus. Yet I am not the Christ. Only the Christ as manifested in history could meaningfully be sacrificed. This is a claim about the human or personal nature of God. Only the Christ in history could demonstrate the power (not the force) of God or a kind of divine response-ability for persons. It is not my responsibility to self-sacrifice for the world. That can only be given to the Christ in history.

### 3. Responsibility and the Recovery of Creative Power

Berdyaev may have spoken of responsibility in theological language of poetic quality, but it is Perls who has developed thoroughly its meaning and power. Responsibility

is the power of creative form-ability. It is crucial in the understanding of gestalt therapy (as a therapy of the recovery of creative power) to distinguish between the person and the role of the person as the former of gestalten. If it is valid to speak of sin as brokenness, brokenness which is the creation of the person, then restoration or reconciliation involves the owning of that creation and creative power. This is responsibility in its fullest sense. In the following, Perls speaks of this dynamic.

The source of the danger [that "to excite the conflict weakens the self"] is that a large part of the self is already apparently invested in some weak figure, a facile choice having been previously made. If a new excitation is accepted from the alienated background, the conflict will destroy this weak "self" -- the self will lose such organization as it has; therefore, it is said, play down the new excitation. But in fact the self is only apparently invested in the weak figure, for the self is not the figure it creates but the creating of the figure: that is, self is the dynamic relation of ground and figure.<sup>23</sup>

This fact has infinite implications for therapy as well as for ministry. It has meaning for theology and religious expression. Two of these are worth mentioning in this sketch, the problem of sin and the symbol of eating.

Sin will be a viable concept only as long as its dynamic is properly understood, current attempts to return to its common use notwithstanding. Common usage has generally been skewed to suit societal biases. As Berdyaev has

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<sup>23</sup>Perls, Gestalt Therapy, p. 413.

said:

It is an astounding thing that when people repent they do not, as a rule, repent for that for which they needed to repent. Torquemada did not repent of his actual sin as an inquisitor, he was convinced that he was serving God. Christian people desire not so much a real change and transformation of their nature as absolution for their sins.<sup>24</sup>

This distorted notion of sin is kin to the ordinary distortion of the meaning of responsibility. Guilt should be exchanged for resentment, which at least owns the possibility that something is amiss and that there is energy to change it. Freedom in religion will require restoration symbols which embody transformation, beyond salvation in its simplistic sense.

One possibility which brings together Perlsian psychology and a religion of spirit is the symbol of the eucharist. Perls has developed a psychology of hunger and consumption. He has also brought much psychological skill to bear on the problem of the creation of false worlds in human consciousness. In light of his contribution we read these words of Berdyaev:

There are two symbols, bread and money; and there are two mysteries, the eucharistic mystery of bread and the satanic mystery of money. We are faced with a great task: to overthrow the rule of money and to establish in its place the rule of bread. Money divorces spirit and world, spirit and bread, spirit and labour. In the first place, money undermines the whole spirituality comprehending the whole of humane life. Thus severed from the whole life,

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<sup>24</sup>Berdyaev, The Divine and the Human, p. 94.

spirituality is made to justify the power of money and to betray the symbol, bread. In the symbol of bread spirit becomes one with the flesh of the world. The dispiritualized world worships the symbol of money. The kingdom of money is an objectified kingdom. But the symbol of bread leads to authentic existence.<sup>25</sup>

#### 4. Responsibility and the Kingdom of God

A point to which the discussion returns with the same certainty that the gestalt moves toward completion, is the concept of the Kingdom. The thought of Perls and Berdyaev is holistic, existential, and eschatological. The creation of the Kingdom of God is first internal or existential. It is known in the here and now experience of Christic or higher consciousness. This liberating consciousness or transfigured consciousness is that for which persons long in their brokenness. A religion of freedom holds out the hope of this experience. The expression of the hope of the Christ is that freedom is a given. This is also part of the meaning of the symbol bread.

Consciousness of the Kingdom as here and now present suggests also that the creation of the Kingdom is the responsibility of the person. This is the other side of the symbol bread; "Take, eat." The only legitimate holding out of the hope of liberation involves the true understanding of sin and response ability. The Kingdom will be discovered

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<sup>25</sup>Berdyaev, Spirit and Reality, p. 178.



only by those who take response ability for its creation in themselves -- those who seek "real change and transformation of their nature" (Reference 24) rather than absolution for their sins. This is the truth expressed in the text: "The Kingdom of Heaven has been coming violently, and men of violence take it by force." (Matthew 11:12)

The creation of the Kingdom is also eschatological, making a difference in history. Even though Perls and Berdyaev are deeply person and present-moment oriented, this is not solipsism. The fact that the self is defined by creative relationship, making self meaningless without both organism and environment, makes events important even in a world which may be perceived splitly. That, too, is the person's act. Thus the Kingdom will only make sense when it involves here and now responsibility of persons in their world bringing transformation to it. This is that "gracious transfiguring creative energy." (Chapter I, Reference 64). Berdyaev expresses human responsibility for brokenness in the world and for bringing in the Kingdom in this way:

Indeed it is a matter of wonder that man acquires the possibility of stable existence in the phenomenal world, in which he finds but a few points of support and meets with only a few who are his neighbors. When he experiences the whole cosmos as neighbor to him, as divine, then he finds not this world of objects, this world which is alien to him, but already the other world, which lies beyond this. And the dissociation of man from the primary source of life, from other human beings, from cosmic life, gives rise to suffering. Whereas

communion, the finding of community and neighbourliness, are the reverse of suffering.<sup>26</sup>

One dimension of this communion includes the understanding of love as a gracious transfiguring perception. The "other" is experienced as a person, a Thou having spirituality, rather than an object. This can be an attitude or orientation. It is a perception of integral beauty. Another aspect of the Kingdom as coming in the world is that responsibility means orientation and manipulation. The Kingdom is built by the perceptions and creations of persons. In this way too, response ability for one's self and in one's world means freedom.

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<sup>26</sup>Berdyayev, The Divine and the Human, p. 71.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE CHARACTER OF FREEDOM AND THE PARISH MINISTER

This chapter examines the implications of human freedom for parish ministry. It is limited purposely to general suggestions since this portion alone could absorb a whole study. The presentation occurs in two areas, each of which warrants consideration in light of the character of freedom, freedom in the minister's self-identity as a professional and freedom in the practice of ministry.

#### A. FREEDOM AND THE MINISTER AS A PERSON

##### 1. The Role of a Sense of Freedom

Parish ministry is usually acknowledged to be a particularly demanding profession among those who have been active in the local church. It is not unthinkable for ministers themselves to talk of the problems of survival, the term suggesting the weightiness attached to their own perception of their existence. This is not without a history which has shaped built-in difficulties to functioning in the profession. These historic and social forces lend cruciality to the role of a sense of freedom in the minister's self-identity.

A local parish church is a social entity. It will reflect the social forces at work in the wider society of

the community and culture of which it is a part. This is the case even if it is, in a sense, 'counter-culture.' Therefore, the American parish church is apt to be deeply steeped in the collective neurosis of the society. In addition, certain aspects of its traditional self-protrayal tend to strengthen the infectuous nature of its neurosis. Such a generalization requires at least some examples of the forces at work.<sup>1</sup> One example is a preference for conflict avoidance rather than openness over differences and conflict resolution. Historically, the valuing of individual interpretation of religious beliefs has meant that groups with differing views would be as likely to separate as to seek a resolution. Current culture often values suppression of differences within a particular cultural grouping in order to maintain unity. Neither approach leads to conflict resolution. Another example of collective neurosis is the tendency to place institutions, leaders, and constituents into "parent-child" relationship roles. There is mother church, and the priest is still "father." Perls identifies these types of roles as the second layer of

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<sup>1</sup>For a poignant statement of the general condition of human life, see "The Anti-Social is Presently the Aggressive," Frederick S. Perls, Ralph E. Hefferline, and Paul Goodman, Gestalt Therapy (New York: Dell, 1951), p. 339. Included are these statements: "The most salient passionate characteristics of our epoch are violence and tameness. . . The deep-going neurosis, which appears masked in such dreams as comic-books and foreign-policy, is retroflected and projected aggression."

neurosis. They tend to enhance non-responsibility in perceptions and attitudes. Another set of social forces is the expectations traditionally placed on ministers. An example is the expectation that the minister will bear the moralistic standards of the community (whether or not he or she happens to agree with those particular standards), while having few, if any, skills. The extreme, traditional stereotype of the minister is that 'he' can not do anything very well except offer public prayers and moralize.

All of this is not to say that there are only problems in the profession. It is only to suggest that a sense of freedom can play a significant role in the minister's self understanding. The parish minister is likely to spend much time in environments in which these stereotypical attitudes are common. Added to the social environment is the minister's own historical pattern of relationship to the church, which may or may not be one of healthy functioning. In all, a sense of freedom or of the ability for creative response is significant to every person in whatever environment. For the professional functioning of a minister in a particularly impersonal situation it can be critical.

Being fully a person means having a sense of freedom. To individuals for whom personhood is a primary value, the role of freedom and a sense of freedom in their own personhood are primary. (One may surmise that persons

would probably be considered of ultimate value by most ministers.) As has been shown, Berdyaev and Perls consider freedom/responsibility the very defining principle of the person. A 'sense of' freedom means a quality of wholeness, centeredness, and integrality. It also implies healthy functioning in the gestalt sense and the awareness of power as opposed to a sense of helplessness in regard to time. This might equally be called a sense of response-ability for one's self in the world.

Needless to say, within the flow of time a person's sense of freedom varies. One moves off center, has a sense of being enslaved, rights oneself to centeredness again, all the while functioning more or less healthily. Still, a human being's overall sense of wellbeing or feeling creatively responsive and personally fulfilled through time depends on the quality and frequency of occasions when this sense of freedom is paramount. Both the minister's realization of full personhood and self identity as a professional require a strong sense of freedom.

## 2. Ministry Understood in Terms of Freedom

The work of ministry can be defined in terms of freedom. Having such a definition may well be one way in which a minister can enhance his or her sense of freedom as a professional. Understanding ministry in terms of freedom follows from a theology of freedom and a religion of free-

dom.

The beginning point would be to define ministry as creative activity and to examine it in that light. Ministry can be understood as creativity in a very wide sense. There is much room for creation in all aspects of ministry. Furthermore, a good deal of ministering is a matter of modeling. To consider one's profession as essentially modeling wholeness in personhood; full, integral, creative acts; is to see personal freedom as a chief aspect of one's job. Simply being response-able in any situation, as a free, creative act, is a ministry to enslaved persons seeking to discover their own freedom.

Another quality of ministry understood in terms of freedom is integrality. In this sense ministry means graciousness and a transfiguring quality in the creative energy radiating from the ministering one. One will not radiate centeredness when fragmented oneself. The full demonstration of love is a function of the true perception of the other as ultimately valuable. The creation of beauty (beauty as a quality of the creative acts of a person) is a function of internal integrality also.

This quality can not be falsely generated. A plastic version, stiff, ossified, stereotypic, can be portrayed. A society itself fragmented may well miss the distinction. Its products will still be empty and themselves mechanical. If the minister is fragmented, if in the minister's orien-

tation and manipulation his or her own needs are not met in the environment, then it is unlikely that others will find that ministry to their lives significant. The meaning of this fact is again that ministry can be understood as first and foremost the ongoing work of healing one's self; of taking response-ability for oneself; of claiming one's own freedom. When this occurs, time stands still; there is convened the Kingdom of God.

A final area of the meaning of ministry as freedom is awareness. In order for creative activity issuing in integrality to occur, there must be awareness. The dynamic of creation may be formation out of no-thing, but creation does not occur in a vacuum. Ministry involves contact and awareness, for one cannot minister without connection with persons and awareness of their needs as well as one's own. In acknowledging the role of awareness in ministry, one is recognizing that the professional role of the minister is to be able-to-respond to persons. Awareness also points to another aspect of ministry, the importance of grounding. This is an aspect of the person as microcosm. Beauty in the creative acts of the ministering person requires not only awareness of the emerging need, but also a sense of being grounded -- in touch with the ground or resources.

### 3. Personal Beauty and Creativity

The role of beauty in ministry cannot be understa-



ted although it is not often considered in a statement of valuable qualities in ministry. Creativity is such a major part of ministry that the qualities of beauty should not be passed over. Parish ministry is a profession with enormous room for creativity in how to meet people and how to develop relationships, in how to function as a leader in organizing for tasks, in leading worship which is a high art, and leading in the discovery of the revelation of the tradition. In fact, whether or not one chooses to define ministry in terms of freedom, what one does most in ministering is to create. One can do so poorly, or well. One will, in fact, bring more or less newness, beauty, and life to creation; and more or less ossification, fragmentation, and implosion.

Therefore the capacity for beauty, the understanding of its meaning and its ways, is highly valuable. Some elements of beauty, as we have seen, include awareness, refinement and wholeness. Beauty in one's own personhood, as reviewed in previous statements, is a matter of quality gestalt functioning. Recalling each element of beauty in turn, personal awareness employs quality in contact rather than avoidance mechanisms. Quality refinement means the destructuring of what is taken in and building the emerging gestalt from its purified elements. Wholeness is the completion which is a transfiguration. In counseling, for example, the ability to perceive and to radiate the transformative perception of another person's ultimate value

includes all of these aspects together. One may aggressively sift through much confusing verbiage to discover the element of value. The minister whose own manner of selfcreation incorporates quality functioning attains the internal beauty which radiates transformative energy. The minister who is creative will be the one who has a sense of the qualities of esthetics in all that is done.

These elements of beauty are to be seen in the work of the creative person in all tasks of ministry as a responsible profession. Awareness is clear contact in the medium, whether it be a relationship, worship (as drama), music, a group or language. Refinement requires aggressiveness (the employment of skills in purification, distillation, and removal of the waste) and also the creative attitude toward the emerging, refined figure-against-background. Wholeness includes the pausing-in-mystery before the completed work. It is the conscious awareness of beauty in its moment of finishedness. All of these, the pieces of the process and awareness in it and of it, work together dynamically as a concerted gestalt. Therein is beauty, that all aspects come together in wholeness.

Returning to the beginning point of this reflection on freedom and the minister as a person, a sense of freedom (consciously acknowledged as such or not) may play a crucial role in a minister's self-identity. That sense of freedom is likely to be realized when the minister perceives that what he or she is as a person and what is done as a profes-

sional are full of beauty. This will mean that the ministering one perceives self and profession as his or her ability to respond creatively, in freedom.

## B. FREEDOM AND THE TRADITIONAL MINISTRIES

In order to move toward more clarity in the realizing of freedom in parish ministry, this final section redefines some of the traditional areas of ministry in light of freedom/responsibility. These traditional categories are in a real sense the media for the minister as a creator. It is important to clarify and continually recall in reading this section as in the previous sections, that this is not to be taken as a reducing everything in the practice of ministry or in religious heritage to freedom. It is rather an attempt to show the relationship of freedom, as understood here, to these rich traditions.

### 1. Calling to Freedom

The human condition being in a state of brokenness, persons value and seek out wholeness. This is not to be understood simplistically; persons use many techniques to avoid wholeness. Freedom/responsibility is also a burden and slavery/non-responsibility is the easier path. At the same time, persons desire wholeness. This being the case, the traditional task of preaching specifically, and the wider notion of evangelism generally, can be considered

calling persons to claim freedom.

The dynamic of importance here is that of the impasse. Calling to freedom may be seen as parallel to the therapist's effort to create a situation of "safe" conflict. In this the environment is felt to be safe for the risk involved in moving through the impasse. At the same time the elements of the person's dividedness are brought into vivid or heightened awareness. The person's own desire for wholeness and his or her own response ability in re-creation are trusted by therapist or minister.

Traditionally, preaching includes elements of both grace and judgment. These can be seen as precisely the creation of a sense of safeness and heightened awareness of brokenness. Creative preaching includes the grace/judgment dynamic as skillfully and beautifully portrayed as it needs to be in the therapeutic situation. The preacher who leads a congregation through the avoidance and games layer into the impasse skillfully, will have used judgment as a revelation of one's brokenness rather than as judgment on one's personhood. The latter would make it difficult to envision a sense of safety in taking the risk. Grace is understood here not as a promise of what the outcome will be, but rather the faith "that if one takes a step there will be ground underfoot."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 343.

Calling to freedom, then, is calling a person to his or her own response ability. It involves holding out the fact of freedom/responsibility in its unavoidable truth as well as in its hope. The hope in calling to freedom is holding out the Kingdom as here and now breaking into the world in beauty, integrality, and the peace of wholeness. These words of Perls help to confirm that the Kingdom is at hand and will be convened by those who choose it.

Yet we know that underlying the 'defensive' characteristic, indeed, in the defensive characteristic, there is always a beautiful affirmative child-like feeling: indignation in the defiance, loyal admiration in the clinging, solitude in the loneliness, aggressiveness in the hostility, creativity in the confusion. . . "3

## 2. Educating to Freedom

Freedom in the educational task has several distinguishable elements; the first of which is the given content. The content of religious learning is learning the meaning of the tradition. This is no rote exercise, for how one learns (the form or perception with which data is received) will be significant in a person's creative self-definition of relationship to the tradition. The religious tradition itself can be seen as evidence of the fact of human freedom and revelatory of the nature of human freedom. As an example, salvation history in the Old Testament can be

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 285.

seen as accounts of how persons experienced two dynamics. They are: 1.) the inbreaking of divine/human creative acts into historical time interacting with 2.) the ongoing problem of human non-response-ability and brokenness. This is not meant to be a simplistic treatment of Biblical theology, rather an attempt to show the possibility of correlating freedom/responsibility to the historic tradition of the church.

The dynamics of freedom as revealed in the gestalt process are superbly applicable to educational processes. Just an awareness of the gestalt understanding can be most informative to a concept of how learning occurs. Learning happens in meaningful gestalts. This includes contact-awareness, breakdown and assimilation in a meaningful form, and the completion or 'ahah' of revelation. Educational approaches heightening a creative environment (in which the posing of elements for contact-awareness occur) are most likely to facilitate learning. It is also important for persons to begin the learning at the point where they feel responsible or are able to identify. The impasse needs be understood here as in preaching. This is to say that true learning resolves a problem and therefore may not be easy.

The most important task for the educational ministry (as well as the other ministries) is that of nurturing an understanding of persons. The person's ultimate value is

given much lip service and not enough demonstration. Educating to freedom means both telling and demonstrating an attitude of love, that the person's value and power reside in the fact that he or she is a creator or spiritual reality. This is the very definition of a person.

The most general definition of freedom, including all partial definitions, is to say that freedom is a definition of man, not from without, but from within, from the spirit. The spiritual element in man is through freedom and the denial of the spiritual, carried to its logical conclusion, inevitably leads to a denial of freedom.<sup>4</sup>

### 3. Freedom and the Pastor-Priest

This category could be divided into the main tasks of counseling and worship. Their unity here is a correlation of the more traditional religious modes of dealing with sin, confession-absolution and community celebration.

My bias is that the tools of gestalt therapy are of supreme value in the counseling task. That is not a rejection of other tools which are also valuable. It is only to suggest that gestalt theory's holism gives it an edge and can incorporate other useful methods. Here follows an explanation of its versatility as a set of skills for a minister, and a single example of its usefulness. Gestalt therapy techniques do not employ either an analytical

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<sup>4</sup>Nicolai A. Berdyaev, The Realm of Spirit and the Realm of Caesar, (New York: Harper & Brothers; 1952), p. 104.

attitude or a questioning tone. They employ direct and simple commands and coaching. Persons who come to a pastor for counseling usually expect to be listened to, and also to be given some direction. They rarely have objections to following directions per se. The dynamics of gestalt technics are similar to the dynamics of prayer; they are dialogic or conversational; they tend to evoke utter honesty and focusing upon the most intensely held emotions and perceptions. My experience has been that the gestalt techniques have been the most valuable counseling tools for working with persons whose expectation of the pastor is within a narrowly defined, 'religious' framework.

The example I would report concerns a woman who this description would fit. She reported to me several dreams or images she had including two which concerned Jesus and 'the devil'. I asked her to dialogue with each on the occasions when she reported them. The dialogue technique made perfect sense to her. I did not need to try to explain it. In each case significant integration occurred of fragments of herself. I have no overall success story to relate. She did not want to have regular counseling at a nearby clinic or with a private therapist. I report this case only as an example of the value of gestalt therapy techniques in one person's work at -- and finding creative solutions to -- two, immediate, perceived problems.



Above all Gestalt therapy respects persons as response-able for themselves. This is freedom acted out in therapy.

Worship can be approached from many perspectives. From the perspective of a religion of freedom, worship is a creative act. To be more precise with this term 'creative act,' worship is a kind of drama. It is a reenactment of the meaning of grace/judgment as it is experienced by the community. In pursuing this concept, Paul W. Pruyser has a statement relating worship and play activity.<sup>5</sup> Play as in child's play and play as in the theater exhibit some of the same characteristics. It is in this same sense of worship as a drama or play that worship as a creative act becomes meaningful.

Freedom is informative to worship in several ways. If worship is a creative act, then it is an act of freedom. The acting out in worship of the dynamics of judgment/grace in one's life has the same potential for transformation and wholeness as does acting out the dynamics of figure/ground in a dialogue in a gestalt group. They are different modes and settings but the dynamic is potentially the same. It is the creative reintegration of broken aspects of oneself.

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<sup>5</sup>Paul W. Pruyser, A Dynamic Psychology of Religion (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 189-190.

Beauty is an idea that is important in worship. To be a creative act, worship must be whole and its process must exhibit beauty's qualities as well. Beauty is not perfection; it is a quality of heightened awareness, refinement, and wholeness. Beauty is increased not so much in rigid uniformity as when diverse elements are truly integrated. The eucharist as potent in connection with human creative and free processes has been discussed in Chapter III. The meal together as a focus of the fact and power of human freedom/responsibility has rich possibilities in worship as a creative act.

Counseling and worship are only two areas in which the pastor/priest may actualize freedom. Many old forms and traditions bear further study for creativity in ministry. In a time when there is great interest in returning to things religious and still often a painful gap in theology between laity and clergy, the re-creation of old forms can be important. Two forms with which I experimented are the 'alter call' and anointing as a symbol for healing. I report excitement from myself and others over these experiments. I suggest above all, if this is to be truly an experience of freedom/responsibility, the old forms must be thoroughly deconstructed, and reconstructed as new and transfigured creations. A simple return to piety may mean that in a few years the church will have much to

regurgitate.

There is ample room for creativity for one who is able to respond (aggressively) within the ministry of the pastor/priest. This is the point of freedom in an all-too-often burdensome role.

#### 4. The Response/Able Administrator

Freedom in administration may not have the shiny appearance of creative worship or counseling, but it is no less possible and certainly no less important. In the function of administration the problem of time is perhaps the most severe. All too often one moment becomes the "means for the next".<sup>6</sup> Freedom in administration will mean, above all, a powerfully creative relationship to time.

Much of this transfiguring attitude toward time will involve the ecstasy of creation in all that one does, which implies skill as a manager of completable tasks. However, even more crucial is the personalization of time. Ministering in the administrative tasks means the awareness of the ultimacy of the value of persons in relationship to time. This awareness is actualized in a fullness of "presence," here and now for persons. The sense of full presense with other persons is a creation of beauty in which time stands still. Time, after all, is a function of change in

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<sup>6</sup>Berdyayev, The Realm of Spirit. . ., p. 51.

persons and not change in persons a function of time. A minister can be "in command" of time by precision in awareness and by creative response to his or her own emerging needs and the needs of others. The skills of focusing on clarity and sharpness in the emerging need are invaluable for responsibility in time. It is not surprising that these skills resemble the gestalting digestion process.

Another area of creativity or freedom in administration is the manipulation of symbols and ideas. Two specific examples stand out. The first is the use of precise and holistic language. Perls has several ideas of how ordinary language patterns are split and enslaving. The use of questions when one wants to make statements (especially 'why' questions), the use of 'but' which sets up a split when one can use 'and' to show connection-in-difference, and the use of 'have to' when one means 'choose to,' are all examples. The ordinary usages show persons denying their own power. Simply using the more precise or whole language can be a way of reclaiming one's resident responsibility. This is also excellent modeling.

A tool which can be a powerful ministry of liberation is conflict management. It has been suggested that our present culture values conflict avoidance. Meanwhile our differences go unresolved, only to create blockages to fulfillment, to relationship, and to peaceful communion. The creative administrator is the one who is keenly aware of his

or her own internal conflicts and their resolution in the holistic dialogic process. This ability translates to the aiding of others in their internal conflict resolution in counseling, and to leading groups of persons into open awareness and appreciation of their conflicts and the finding of true solutions.

Another aspect of wholeness in administration, which leads to beauty in a creative managerial style, is the awareness of, and response ability to, systems. A systems understanding, when carefully assimilated, will lend a quality of integrality to the functioning of the church.

In all of these suggested areas of creativity or freedom in administration, the underlying theme is an attitude of nurturing. This is similar to a liberating perception of the educational task. Knowing and acting upon one's freedom is nurturing. This is the case for, understanding responsibility is knowing that for which one is able to respond and also knowing that for which one is not response-able. Distinguishing between these two and acting accordingly (in truth and therefore in love) is nurturing other response-able persons.

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